

Al-Ahram Weekly

Published in Cairo by AL-AHRAM established in 1875

23 - 29 October 1997 | 20 Pages | P.T.75



Mandela, portrait of the week by Bahgory 12

Miracle only

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak, in an interview published by the London-based Arabic daily *Al-Hayat* yesterday, said Egypt would attend the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) economic conference in Doha next November, only if progress was made in the Arab-Israeli peace process. A miracle needed to take place between now and the scheduled date of the conference, on 16 November, however, the president said.

Egypt will be monitoring the situation right up to the last minute and will decide on whether or not to participate in the MENA conference three or four days before it starts, Mubarak said. Egypt will do this, the president explained, so as not to be accused of exerting pressure on other Arab parties.

Mubarak accused Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of repeatedly breaking his promises, including agreements bearing his signature. Progress will be made only if the US exerted more effort to convince Israel to respect its peace commitments and halted settlement activities.

Left fury

REMARKS made by Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu during a religious service yesterday raised a furor among Israel's left wing opposition, reported AP. Netanyahu, unaware that his remarks to Rabbi Yitzhak Kadouri during a synagogue service were being recorded, accused his leftist opponents in the Labour-led alliance of forgetting "what it means to be Jewish."

Within hours, the Likud prime minister's remarks were top news on Israeli television and radio stations. The left parties were enraged. Labour Party leader Ehud Barak said Netanyahu was "a disgrace to us all", while Meretz leader Yossi Sarid described him as "a despicable man... who has long forgotten what it means to be a human being."

Later, Israeli peace activists wearing gas masks marked Netanyahu's 48th birthday with a protest outside his home calling for his immediate ousting. One protester held a chocolate cake with a memorial candle that apparently symbolised the death of the peace process. (see p.6)

Mixed career

RECENTLY opened French police records reveal that the number of Algerians killed during a protest in Paris in 1961 was much higher than French officials admitted at the time.

The 1961 protest, staged as Algeria was fighting French occupation, was against a curfew imposed on the Algerian community in Paris. Authorities at the time said only three people died but a glance at the archives shows at least 70 people died, some tossed into the river Seine.

The records, sealed by law for 60 years, would not have been accessible until 2021. But following testimonies during the trial of Maurice Papon, a senior French civil servant accused of deporting Jews during World War II and chief of the Paris Police at the time of the protest, the government decided to open the archives.

Papon's defence lawyer also displayed an Uzi submachine gun in court on Tuesday, saying it was a thank you present from the Israeli ambassador in Paris in 1964 for his help in smuggling American weapons loaded on American planes into Israel in 1948.

Night thoughts

Dennis Ross's latest visit to the region seems to indicate little more than a dizzying propensity to go round in circles, writes **Graham Usher** *from Jerusalem*

The diplomatic highlight of US special envoy Dennis Ross's trip to Jerusalem two weeks ago was his brokering of a pre-dawn meeting between Binyamin Netanyahu and Yasser Arafat, their first get together in nearly eight months. The highlight of Ross's current foray was another nocturnal session, this time on Tuesday between Arafat and Israel's Defence Minister, Yitzak Mordechai.

The only difference between these meetings appears to be one of form. While the first liaison was held under a veil of secrecy, the second took place under the full glare of the media, with Mordechai and Arafat surrounded by a bevy of their respective military heads, including IDF chief of staff, Amnon Shahak, on the Israeli side and Palestinian Authority (PA) intelligence heads Jibril Rajoub and Mohamed Dahlan on the Palestinian. But the substance of the two meetings seems to have been identical.

"The main things discussed today were coordination and integration in the security sphere," said Mordechai. Arafat agreed. "We were able to review a wide range of security issues and concerns," he said. As for the 36 other unresolved "interim" issues still outstanding between the two sides, "the talks will continue and we hope they will achieve results," said Arafat, a little wearily. The Palestinian leader's fatigue, though, is understandable, since "talks continuing" is merely an acceptable formula for saying that so far nothing has been achieved.

The ostensible reason for Ross' current visit was to monitor the work of the nine Palestinian-Israeli joint committees set up in September to implement the interim issues. If Ross wanted a result to take back to Washington, he appears to have been disappointed. On the questions of establishing a safe passage between Gaza and the West Bank, opening a Palestinian airport and harbour in Gaza and further prisoner releases, Palestinian negotiators say the talks "are going round in circles." Israeli negotiators say "progress is being made." Given the Likud government's understanding of Oslo, these assessments are not necessarily contradictory.

But the main aim of Ross's visit was to work out a formula to resolve the substantive issues that divide the two sides ahead of the meeting next week in Washington between Israel's foreign minister, David Levy, and the PLO chief negotiator, Mahmoud Abbas. On these issues, Ross appears to have spent the bulk of his time trying to give content to Madeleine Albright's proposal that each side take "a time out from unilateral acts" for the duration of Oslo's final status negotiations.

For Palestinians, Israeli acts on which "time" should be called are house demolitions, the removal of residency status from Palestinians in East Jerusalem, land confiscation and, above all, settlement construction. Israel has barely referred to the first three. On the fourth — and perhaps in response to US pressure — there appears the vaguest of movements. Following a meeting with Ross on 20 October, Levy said Israel would undertake only the "minimum necessary" settlement construction for the six to nine months now allotted to the final status talks.

No one is yet sure what flesh to hang on this bone, but a sign was given by a "senior Israeli official" quoted in the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* on 19 October. He said the Netanyahu government would be prepared to "halt, curtail or slow down any settlement expansion in the pipeline, but will not stop any settlement construction already begun". There are at present 4,000 housing units being built in 60 settlements across the West Bank and Gaza. Nor, said the official, would the "slow down" apply to occupied East Jerusalem, where 2,456 units are going up on Jebel Abu Ghneim for the Har Homa settlement alone. If this is what Israel means by "time out", Levy and Abbas should save themselves the time of travelling to Washington.

Nor do the other points of contention appear any closer to resolution. As an exchange for any "slowdown" in settlement building, Israel wants to proceed immediately to the final status negotiations. The Palestinians want the final status talks to be conditional on Israel implementing the second phase of the West Bank redeployment, now nearly two months overdue. They also want to be "consulted" and have the Americans arbitrate over the scale of the redeployment. Netanyahu, however, will have none of it.

According to the Israeli newspaper *Ma'ariv*, the Israeli leader told Ross at their meeting on 19 October that he would not "hand over additional territory" to the Palestinians "without knowing clearly, over a length of time and in a methodical fashion, that the Palestinian Authority is conducting a war against terror." The days of Israel making "unilateral compromises" to the Palestinians "are over" he told the special envoy. "Take it out of your lexicon".

Friend and mentor



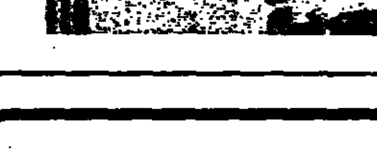


photo: Randa Shaath

SATURDAY marked the beginning of a three day gathering of distinguished figures from throughout the Arab world, convened to commemorate the first anniversary of the death of the writer and journalist Ahmed Bahaeddin.

During his long career in journalism, Ahmed Bahaeddin presided over some of the most prestigious Arabic publications, including *Rose El-Youssef*, *Al-Ahram* and the Kuwait-based *Al-Arabi*.

Bahaeddin occupies a unique place in the history of Arab journalism. He was an intellectual in a profession notorious for its short memory, and throughout his distinguished career strove to elevate the practice of that profession to sophisticated levels while retaining the rare ability to reach out and directly address his readers. And today, just as during his lifetime, he remains the focus of a rare consensus in a very divided Arab world, counting among his friends and admirers intellectuals and political leaders of very different ideological and political persuasions.

The Society of the Friends of Ahmed Bahaeddin, formed after his death, have been working for a year, in cooperation with Bahaeddin's family, towards establishing a cultural foundation in his name. At Saturday's general assembly they unveiled their plans for the next three years, which include building a school in his native village and establishing scholarships *in his name*.

The three days of activities included a reception attended by leading politicians and journalists from across the region, and culminated on Monday with a piano recital by Yasser Mukhtar and a poetry reading by Mahmoud Darwish, pictured left, who began his recitation by paying tribute to a friend and mentor who, "though absent can never be fully so."

'Hand-shakes are not enough'

Amr Moussa, attending the opening ceremony of the Peres Centre for Peace, questioned the possibility of economic cooperation in the absence of any progress towards peace. Dina Ezzat reports

Although prospects for achieving a breakthrough in the Middle East peace process appear, after a nine month hiatus, to be diminishing, former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres apparently remains optimistic. So much so that, amid great fanfare at a Tel Aviv ceremony on Monday, he launched the Peres Centre for Peace — an institution intended to encourage and promote business ties between Arabs and Israelis. It will not, though, directly address political problems.

Throughout Tuesday's event, economic cooperation was resolutely talked up, despite the stalemate in peace making. And just to show that he really "meant business", lengthy proposals for regional cooperation were outlined in intricate detail.

Egypt, though, refused to be swayed by all the euphoria and optimism, maintaining its long held position — that regional cooperation can only be based on a solid political foundations which must include Israeli withdrawal from occupied Arab territories, Palestinian self-determination and the eradication of weapons of mass destruction from the Middle East.

In a strongly worded speech, Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, attending the ceremony, he said, in an attempt to encourage the advocates of peace within Israel, dampened speculation on the possibility of regional economic cooperation in the current political climate.

"If developments are positive, regional economic cooperation moves ahead," the foreign minister affirmed. "If developments are negative, regional economic cooperation will certainly suffer. This is the way it is."

Moussa's speech also contained a warning: "To try to humiliate the Palestinian partner and deprive the Palestinian people of hope in a better future... is to close all avenues for conciliation and peaceful relations," he said.

To reinforce his message, Moussa cited the reluctance of many Arab states to take part in the fourth Middle East/North Africa economic cooperation conference scheduled to be held in Doha, Qatar, next month. Declaring that the "ball is in the Israeli court," Moussa said the Israeli government has to reconsider its policy if "this important concept" of regional economic cooperation is to be saved.

Peres, though, remained determined to forge ahead. "Peace has many facets," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "Political peace is in the hands of governments but economic and social peace," he continued, are open to the contribution of all.

In addition to Moussa, an impressive array of political figures were present at the centre's opening ceremony. They included American envoy Dennis Ross, European envoy Miguel Moratinos and former US Secretary of State Warren Christopher.

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu was conspicuously absent. Cabinet ministers Yitzhak Mordechai and Ariel Sharon made a brief appearance. But throughout the five-hour ceremony, Peres had the full backing of President Ezer Weizman and Leah Rabin, widow of the assassinated Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

"The time has come," said Peres, "to build a Middle East for the people, not merely for the rulers."

Indeed, the principal target of the Peres Centre is to advance "Arab-Israeli cooperation by creating a wide range of projects in the fields of peace economics, peace education and social development." The centre also aims at initiating "academic research and teaching activities in the fields of diplomacy, negotiation and regional development."

Said Peres: "What we are trying to do now is the globalisation of peace, the privatisation of peace." He believes that the current political deadlock will not last for long because "nobody wants another war" and sooner or later the governments in the region "will face this reality."

Meanwhile, Moussa asserted that Egypt's participation in the Doha conference will depend on progress in the peace-making process. But the foreign minister was pessimistic. Despite the revival of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, Moussa said that the chances of a breakthrough are dim.

"I am sorry to say that the majority of us here [in Egypt], in the Middle East and even outside it, are really pessimistic," Moussa said on the eve of his arrival in Tel Aviv for the short visit to attend the inauguration ceremony.

At a meeting with David Levy, Moussa was asked by Israeli press and media photographers to shake hands with the Israeli foreign minister. "I am going to shake hands with the minister," Moussa responded, "but I don't think that shaking hands or smiling are enough. They are not enough." (see p.5)

M. KHODEIR P.O.BOX 1057, CAIRO 11511, TEL:418-0034/418-0035 FAX:418 28 83

Al-Ahram Weekly

Man of Good Hope

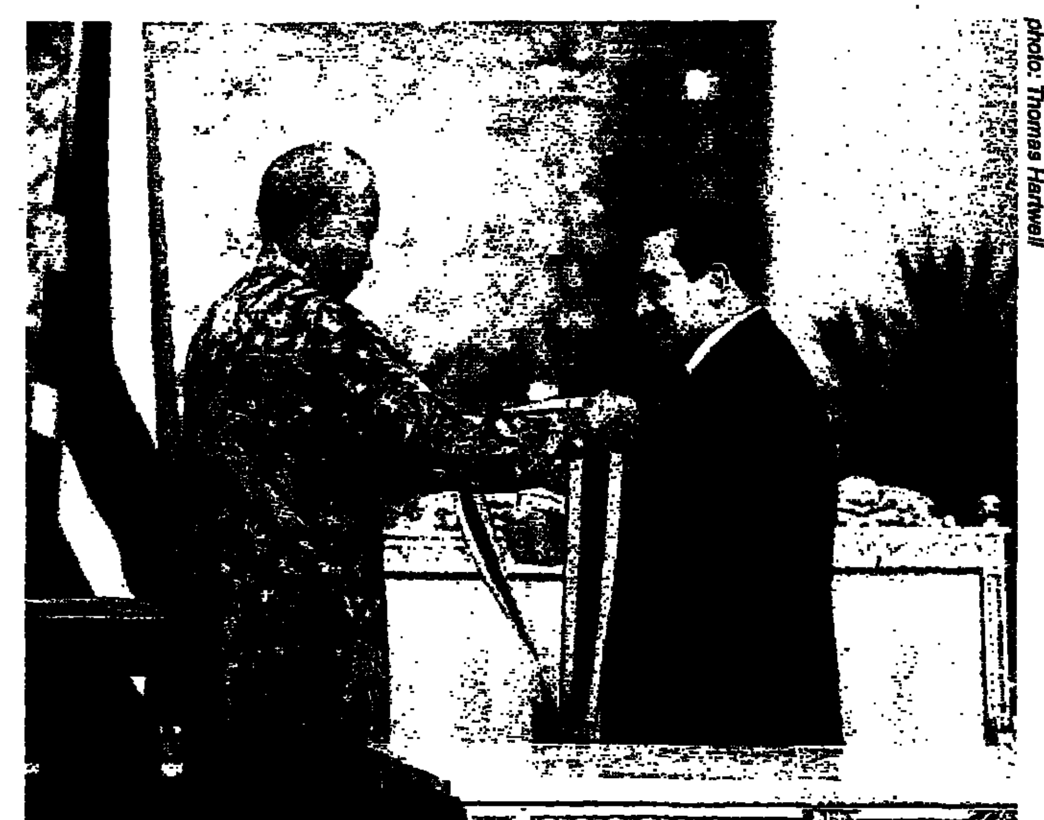


photo: Thomas Hartwell

Mubarak and Mandela exchange their respective countries' highest awards

President Mandela has successfully led South Africa through its transition from apartheid state to beacon of hope for a democratic multi-cultural Africa. His talks with President Mubarak reflected the breadth of his vision, writes Gamal Nkrumah

Tuesday's talks between South African President Nelson Mandela and President Hosni Mubarak focused on the Organisation of African Unity's attempts to mediate in the crisis between Libya and the West. Mandela left Cairo Wednesday morning in defiance of angry American protests and flew to Tunisia on his way to Libya. In order to avoid the UN-imposed ban, Mandela flew from Cairo to Tunis and thence to Djerba were he was met by high-ranking Libyan officials who escorted him on the 250-kilometre drive to Tripoli.

"No country has the right to dictate the foreign policy agendas of other countries," South African President Nelson Mandela said in an interview with the Egyptian English-language television station Nile TV. In a barely veiled criticism of the United States, Mandela urged African countries and the international community to pursue independent foreign policies that further their own interests. Mandela was curt, accusing Washington of "arrogance" and "racism". He reminded viewers that Mu'ammar Gaddafi's Libya had stood by the African National Congress long before they had come to power in South Africa.

The timing of Mandela's visit to Tripoli coincides with hearings at the International Court of Justice in The Hague into Libyan complaints that Britain and America refused to accept the outcome of the Libyan investigation into the 1988 bombing of a Pan-Am plane over the Scottish village of Lockerbie.

"South Africa believes that the regime of sanctions against Libya really ought to be done away with," South African Foreign Minister Alfred Nzo told the political correspondent of South African State Radio SABC, Manelisi Dubasee, in Cairo on Monday. "There is no point in exposing the population of Libya collectively to punishment," he said.

Who says Mandela's reputation as a political magician is wearing thin? Even the United States, miffed at Mandela's decision to visit Libya, recently paid tribute to the grand old man of the African political scene. US State Department spokesman James Ruben attempted to clear the air on Monday saying Washington had "the highest possible respect for President Mandela".

In Cairo, Mubarak and Mandela awarded each other their respective countries highest honours. Mubarak awarded Mandela the Collar of the Nile, while Mubarak received the Order of Good Hope. Mandela praised Mubarak for pursuing "the tradition of active participation in the struggle to end colonialism and secure the rights of Africa."

In an emotional outpouring of gratitude for Egypt's stand against apartheid, Mandela said: "It is a great honour indeed to receive so high an award from a country with an ancient and distinguished history, from a people who stood with us in our struggle *for freedom. I visited Cairo in* 1962 as a freedom fighter when we embarked on our armed struggle. I came again in 1990 when the people of South Africa, together with freedom-loving peoples across the world, had opened the prisons of apartheid. We came then to say that the people of South Africa would never forget the support of the Egyptian government and people — and today once again we thank you from the bottom of our heart. Indeed, it is no accident that Africa's greatest city has been a port of call at each stage of our long journey to freedom."

Mandela also paid a vibrant tribute to the late President Gamal Abdel-Nasser, Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, Mozambique's Samora Machel and other leading anti-colonial African leaders. He described Nasser as "one of Africa's outstanding patriots, a leader from whom we drew great inspiration." He later laid a wreath on Nasser's grave and met members of the Nasser family.

South Africa has now made the transition from a society struggling under the political and economical burden of institutionalised racism to a thriving democracy. Mubarak told reporters after their hour-long meeting, that he and Mandela had discussed more general African affairs as well as bilateral relations. South Africa is spearheading the continental drive towards democratisation, and Mandela is actively involved in mediation efforts to end civil wars raging across the continent, including that in Sudan. However, Mandela's proposed meeting with Sudanese opposition groups during his stay in Cairo failed to materialise. Nor did his tight schedule permit him to meet with representatives of several Somali factions who were in Cairo at the same time.

Egypt and South Africa signed five cooperation pacts during Foreign Minister Amr Moussa's visit to South Africa last August.

Mandela is on his first official visit to Egypt since being elected President in May 1994. Mandela was accompanied by Graça Machel, widow of former Mozambican President Samora Machel — his official companion. He was last in Cairo in January 1993, when he attended an OAU summit meeting.



Activating Africa ties

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak held talks with his Malawian counterpart Pakili Molosi on Sunday, covering bilateral relations and Egypt's bid to join the Community of Eastern and Southern Africa [COMESA], reports **Nevine Khalil**.

On the bilateral level, the two men discussed ways of building strong economic relations in the fields of investment, management and industry, according to Foreign Minister Amr Moussa. "We are trying to activate our relationship with Malawi and other African countries," Moussa said, "especially in the economic sphere."

Cairo wants to see greater Egyptian-African economic cooperation, hence its desire to join COMESA. Malawi, a COMESA member, is supporting Egypt's bid to join this economic organisation.

Molosi also presided over the signing of a number of bilateral economic agreements, including one for the protection of investments and another for avoiding double taxation. His visit comes shortly after Moussa's African tour on which he was accompanied by a number of businessmen. Similarly, a number of Malawian businessmen accompanied the president and met with their Egyptian counterparts, who expressed their desire to invest in various projects in Malawi.

Moussa said that the trade imbalance between the two countries must be redressed because while Egypt does not export anything to Malawi, it imports $40 million worth of Malawian products, namely, tea, tobacco and meat. Molosi discussed with Minister of Agriculture Youssef Wali ways of improving agricultural relations, especially given that Malawi is located "on fertile territory with plenty of water resources and vast agricultural lands", according to Moussa.

Malawi's president also met with the ministers of irrigation and housing to initiate cooperation in these fields. With the heath minister, Molosi discussed the possibility of licensing Egyptian pharmaceutical products in Malawi.

On Monday, Molosi held talks with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, before leaving the country on Tuesday.

'Off with her head!'









Several books about the death of Princess Diana put forward conspiracy theories, insisting she was killed deliberately for planning to marry an Egyptian Muslim. Shaden Shehab reviews an array of work rich in "subjective overtones"

The late Princess Diana was popular in Egypt as she was throughout the world. Her romance with Dodi (Emad) El-Fayed and their possible marriage had touched the nation's heart.

Then came the tragic car crash in Paris on 31 August, in which the two were killed. Egyptians reacted with shock, disbelief, suspicion — and a talent for working up a story. For the past six weeks, printing presses have been *churning out books*, alleging that Diana was deliberately murdered for planning to convert to Islam and marry an Egyptian.

Such sensationalist material is guaranteed to sell like hot cakes, and several of the Diana books are reprinting already. Their tone is set by such remarkable titles as: *Princess Diana, Did She Die a Muslim?* (author: Magdi Kamel), *Diana's Conversion to Islam* (authors: Tarek Abdallah and Hisham Khedr), and *The Assassination of a Princess* (author: Ahmed Atta).

Take for example *Diana's Conversion to Islam*. The authors begin by asking: "Who killed her? British intelligence? Israeli intelligence? Or both? Was it the press or was it politics? We believe that Diana's conversion to Islam was the reason she was killed. Why should it not have been? Hadn't she said that she was going to shock the world?"

They go on to allege that the events of the car crash "left no room for doubt" *that Diana's death* was carefully planned. Why? Because the "West fears Islam, and was shaken when it realised that Diana was planning to convert." Her intended marriage to Dodi was not the only reason for "killing her. The principal reason was the fear of her conversion to Islam," they add.

But that is not all. Fears can sometimes become realities. The authors claim that there is a "strong possibility" that the princess had actually embraced Islam before her death. In support of this claim, they cite a statement, already widely publicised in the local press, by the Imam of the royal mosque in Lahore, Abdel-Qader Azad, that Diana was fond of Islam and wished to convert but felt that she needed a man's support. "And indeed, before meeting Dodi, she had a relationship with the Pakistani cardiologist Hassanat Khan," the authors write. QED.

In another highly imaginative passage, the authors allege that Diana was pregnant at the time of her death. How do they know? Simple. MI6 apparently taped a meeting between Diana and Dodi in Mohamed El-Fayed's office at Harrods, in which they were discussing the Kelley Fisher affair — the claim by an American model that Dodi broke his promise to marry her. In the course of this meeting, the authors claim, Diana disclosed that she was pregnant. "Consequently, the Queen instructed MI6 that the Diana-Dodi relationship should be ended but did not specify the means," the authors write.

They also report that during Dodi's burial ceremony, his cousin told *Akhbar Al-Muslemeen* (Muslims' News) newspaper, published in London, that Diana and Dodi had planned to get married in September and that she had planned to convert in the presence of Sheikh Metwalli El-Shaarawi, a popular Egyptian preacher.

Magdi Kamel's *Princess Diana, Did She Die a Muslim?*, which is dedicated "*to the souls of Diana and Emad Fayed*," is an equally creative piece of writing. Like other Egyptian Dianologists, he gallantly refuses to let himself be constrained by the lack of hard evidence to back up his claims. This makes it all the more impressive that he is able to tell his readers exactly how Diana felt and what she thought in many different situations — though, like any journalist worth his salt, he is too discreet to disclose his sources.

According to Kamel, the key influence in Diana's later years was Jemima Goldsmith, the daughter of an Anglo-French billionaire, who "abandoned" a life of wealth and power in order to convert to Islam and share the simple life of Pakistani cricket player Imran Khan. "When Diana visited Jemima, she found her glowing with happiness and satisfaction. Jemima told her the reason was her marriage to an Oriental," Kamel reveals. "Jemima also told Diana that she had never realised her value as a human being until she converted to Islam. From this moment, the idea of marrying an *Oriental and embracing Islam* became embedded in Diana's head. She decided that she wanted to have the same experience as Jemima."

She began by having a relationship with the Pakistani cardiologist, Hassanat Khan. But Khan was threatened by MI6, Kamel alleges, who told him to end the affair and he promptly complied. "Then she met Dodi." Where Khan had failed, only a master strategist could succeed. "The two had met for the first time during a polo match with Prince Charles. Dodi then felt that the royal marriage would not last and he decided to wait until she was free before making his move. Diana found the loving Oriental she was looking for. Dodi, the woman hunter, realised that this time it was he who was the prey, because he had truly fallen in love." The book is full of this kind of penetrating insight.

In the final chapter, the author writes: "If works are to be judged by intentions and if Diana had actually decided to convert to Islam before her death ... then it is possible that she died a Muslim."

Ahmed Atta's book, *The Assassination of a Princess*, relates the various stages of Diana's life, before suggesting that she was killed by British intelligence for planning to marry an Egyptian Muslim. This by now less-than-original argument leads the author to raise many important questions about the circumstances of the car crash, such as why the Mercedes was moving at such great speed, why Diana didn't take her armoured Jaguar and whether the Mercedes was hit by another car. The author also suggests that the paparrazzi who were chasing the Mercedes on motorcycles were used by the MI6 to harass Diana, thus making the crash possible. Surprisingly, however, he declines to implicate the French company who first built the tunnel in the murder.

Egyptian cinema, while apparently more restrained in its reading of the Diana-Dodi story, is no less fired by it than the print-media has been. Egypt is currently front-runner in the race to become the first country to produce a film about Diana's life. Khairi Bishara, one of the nation's top directors, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that he was already hard at work on a script for an "unconventional" film about the Princess and hoped to start shooting in February.

"I am planning an unconventional, low-budget film which will star unknown actors, seeking to portray Diana as a woman with her joys and pains, and not simply as the Princess who fell in love with an Egyptian," Bishara said. "I will focus on how the Princess was constrained by tradition."

Script writers Essam Zakaria and Rafiq El-Sabban hope to finish work by the end of November, Bishara added. Backed by Saudi producer Mohamed El-Qazzazz, Bishara has been collecting every available scrap of information about Diana, filling up countless notebooks which, he hopes, will help provide him with inspiration.

"The film will not be a condemnation or an evaluation. It will simply put on record the episodes of her life, but with certain subjective overtones," Beshara said.

Another top director, Ali Badrakhan, is also reported to be planning a film about Diana. If he wants to introduce a few "subjective overtones" of his own, he need look no further than the researches of the Dianologists. In the wake of the Princess' death, subjectivity is the one thing that has *not* been in short supply.

Bus assailants plead guilty

They say they did it for Islam. The two brothers charged with killing nine Germans and their Egyptian driver in a firebomb attack on a tourist bus last month have pleaded guilty

When their military trial resumed on Saturday, Saber and Mahmoud Farahat pleaded guilty to charges of pre-meditated murder, attacking tourists and using violence and terrorism to harm the national economy, reports **Shaden Shehab**. The two brothers were arrested on 18 September at the scene of their crime — a firebomb attack on a tourist bus outside the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir Square, in which nine Germans were killed along with the Egyptian bus driver. The charges are punishable by the death penalty.

Seven other defendants, who are accused of providing the pair with weapons and teaching them how to make primitive firebombs, pleaded not guilty. The trial opened on 14 October.

"My brother and I are martyrs [for Islam]," Saber, 32, said from within the iron cage where he and Mahmoud, 24, are held while in court. "Europe, the United States and Israel are all plotting against Islam. So, when we kill those infidels, it shows there are men who can do what the regime had failed to do, which is to protect Islam."

Saber, once described as a madman, had told reporters at the opening of the trial that he embraced the ideology of the militant Jihad group, although he was not one of its members. Jihad is the group that was responsible for assassinating President Anwar El-Sadat in October 1981.

In a statement faxed to Western news organisations last Friday, the underground Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya hailed the two brothers as "*mujahedeen*" and said they had "acted in accordance with what their religion and belief dictate. They did not fall back and did not retreat as some others did." The statement added: "*Allahu Akbar* [God is great] for the spirit of Jihad has spread throughout our country and among the various factions of our people."

The Gama'a's statement was the first response by a militant group to the bus attack.

Asked about the statement, Saber said: "I am happy that our brothers are happy."

"We did this for God and not for any group," added Mahmoud, as their mother and sister wept quietly in front of their cage.

The mother, sister and younger brother appeared in court on Saturday for the first time. The family complained to reporters that since Saber's and Mahmoud's arrest, police have shut down their bakery and revoked its licence.

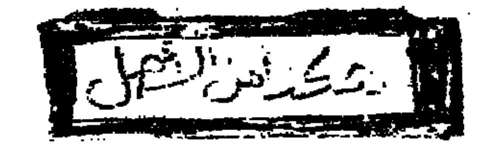
At the third session of the trial yesterday, the military prosecutor demanded the maximum penalty, which is death, for the Farahat brothers.

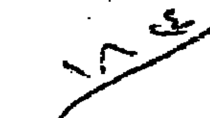
Their mother told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that "they deserve a death sentence and I hope Saber gets cut into tiny pieces and then burned."

On 27 October 1993, Saber opened fire on a group of foreigners inside the coffee-shop of the Semiramis Hotel. Two Frenchmen and an American were killed and another American, a Syrian and an Italian were wounded.

Saber was not put on trial at the time because an examination by psychiatrists at the *government Abbassiya mental hospital*, under the supervision of hospital director Dr Sayed El-Qott, confirmed that he was schizophrenic. Saber later said that he bribed El-Qott to get himself certified as mentally ill. He was confined to El-Khanka mental hospital as of 27 January 1994.

The investigation into the bus attack has revealed that Saber used to bribe doctors and nurses to allow him to leave and return at his own free will. (see p.17)





هكذا من الإهمال



rica ties

Health care for all children

On Sunday, Mrs Suzanne Mubarak inaugurated the new annexes attached to the government-run Sixth of October Hospital in the district of Dokki and to the National Heart Institute in Imbaba, raising their capacity to 400 beds each, reports **Rania Khallaf**.

The Sixth of October Hospital serves government employees, university students and school pupils who are all covered by the national medical insurance programme. Mrs Mubarak said the programme will now be expanded to cover all children from the moment of birth until they finish their education.

Mrs Mubarak expressed her happiness with the medical services available at the hospital and the Heart Institute, describing them as equal to the most advanced in the world.

At the hospital, Mrs Mubarak visited a new dialysis unit, a child-care centre, an open-heart surgery department and an intensive care ward. At the Heart Institute, she visited the new annex which includes seven operating theatres, an intensive care unit and a computerised information system that connects the Institute with medical centres throughout the world by Internet.



'Free play' in Bright Star war games

More than 50,000 troops and 350 warplanes will take part in the main phase of the Bright Star exercise that begins on Saturday along the northern coast and in the Western Desert. Galal Nassar reports

With the first light of dawn on Saturday, vessels of the US Sixth Fleet, backed by naval pieces from Britain, France, Italy and Egypt, will approach the northern coast to stage the biggest landing of troops since the 1991 Desert Storm operation to liberate Kuwait from the Iraqi invaders. The landing will signal the start of the main phase of the Bright Star-97 war games which will continue until 31 October. In addition to the five core nations, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are also taking part, and 22 countries are represented by observers.

According to military spokesman Brig. Gen. Ahmed Gamaleddin, as many as 58,000 troops — 30 per cent of them Egyptian — 372 warplanes — 210 Egyptian — and 29 naval pieces, including the American nuclear-powered aircraft-carrier George Washington, are taking part in the exercise. The land theatre of the war games covers a 5,000 square kilometre area, the naval theatre 10,000 square kilometres and the air theatre 180,000 square kilometres.

The exercise features a confrontation between two neighbouring states — "orange" and "green". The "orange" state mounts an aggressive intervention on the international boundary of the "green" state, claiming historical rights. The "green" state complains to the United Nations which orders a cease-fire. But the "orange" state persists in its attack, sending its forces deep inside the territory of the "green" state. The latter seeks the assistance of friendly forces. The Egyptian forces will be divided between the "orange" and "green" armies. The participating forces from the other six nations will all be "green."

Gamaleddin said that while "green" forces begin landing in the Omayed area of the northern coast on Saturday to repel the invader, other "green" troops will be gathering in the theatre of operations. The "orange" offensive will continue on Saturday-Sunday with the aim of preventing the "green" forces from establishing a defensive line. On Monday-Tuesday, the "green" forces will manage to stop the attacking troops and will then go on the offensive. Despite "enemy" air attacks and the possible use of mass destruction weapons, the "green" forces will succeed in destroying the "aggressors", finishing them off by Thursday.

In what is called "free play", commanders at their various levels will be given complete freedom of decision-making in responding to the actions of the opposite side.

According to Brig. Gen. Abdel-Sattar Salama, who is in charge of joint training at the training authority of the armed forces, "free play" is meant to provide commanders with greater self-confidence, but also requires quick coordination and exact synchronisation between the participating forces.



Salama also said the number of participating nations and forces makes Bright Star-97 the biggest war games ever staged in the Middle East. Another feature of this year's exercise, he said, is that commanders from the participating countries will work "as one team" in the different joint command centres. Another important landmark is the participation for the first time of the American B-2 Stealth jetfighter, he said.

The Bright Star series had a modest start in 1983, when it was confined to Egyptian and American forces. Staged then in the Gabal Hamza region of the Western Desert, Egypt contributed an armoured battalion as well as limited numbers of warplanes, ground, naval and air defence forces. The United States was represented by a mechanised infantry battalion and limited numbers of air and naval forces.

Now it is the biggest war games in the Middle East, and Egypt is contributing two armoured brigades, a mechanised infantry brigade, three mechanised infantry battalions, three armoured battalions, two air defence battalions, a *Saiqa* (commando) battalion, a paratroop platoon, a corvette, a frigate, a submarine, a destroyer, a mine-hunter, missile boats, two landing craft and 210 warplanes of various types.

The United States is contributing the aircraft-carrier George Washington, with 76 warplanes on board, a destroyer, a cruiser, a nuclear-powered submarine, landing craft, a B-2 warplane, four C-130 transports as well as Chinook, Apache and other helicopters.

Britain is contributing a paratroop platoon, three C-130 transports, two Chinook helicopters, a destroyer, landing craft, a submarine, a reconnaissance battalion, an armoured platoon and a mechanised infantry platoon.

France is participating with six Mirage-2000 warplanes, a C-160, three frigates, landing craft, a refuelling vessel, several helicopters, an armoured platoon and a mechanised infantry platoon.

Italy is contributing five AMX (CAS) support aircraft, a mid-air refuelling Boeing 707, a destroyer, a frigate, two mine-hunters, landing craft, a marines platoon, a mechanised infantry platoon and four helicopters.

Kuwait and the UAE are contributing several C-130 and IL-76 transports, six Apache helicopters and platoons of paratroopers and special forces.

Clampdown on 'illegal' universities

Two branches of foreign universities have been forced to shut down on the orders of the minister of higher education but, as Shaden Shehab reports, at least one of them has vowed to fight back

Mufid Shehab, the newly-appointed minister of higher education and scientific research, has ordered two Egyptian branches of American universities — City University and Northeastern University — to close down on the grounds that they were not licensed and were operating illegally. Shehab made the announcement on Monday, 24 hours after the two branches were forced to shut down. The City University branch had opened in 1992, the Northeastern only last year.

To operate legally, private universities must have the authority of a presidential decree, as do all four of the privately-run universities that opened last year. If a foreign university seeks to open a branch in Egypt, this must be sanctioned by a special agreement between the two countries that will make it possible for the university to obtain a licence. This is the case with the American University in Cairo (AUC), but it was not the case with City and Northeastern universities, ministry officials said.

But officials at the branches that had been closed down cited a 1962 scientific agreement between Egypt and the United States that provides for cultural and educational exchange, and insisted that they were operating legally. Moreover, the City University branch was operating under the umbrella of the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport by virtue of an agreement signed between the two sides. Mohamed Hussein, head of the City University branch, argued that since the Academy, which is an Arab League affiliate, is legal, then the branch must be legal too.

Faten Leila, head of the Northeastern University branch, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that she as well as a number of students were contesting the minister's decision before the courts. Describing the closure as "not impartial," she said the branch had operated legally after filing the necessary papers with the Higher Education Ministry.

However, at Monday's news conference, Shehab said the 1962 agreement with the United States does not give American universities the right to open branches in Egypt. For them to do so, the two countries have to sign a special agreement, he said. Shehab also said the the City University branch and the Arab Academy were two separate entities. The Academy does not have the power to endow another body with a legal identity by virtue of an agreement between them, he added.

Shehab, who joined the cabinet in July, formed a committee of legal experts about two months ago to assess the position of the two branches. The committee came to the conclusion that they were operating illegally. But Shehab could not take action until five officials from the Ministry of Higher Education had been given legal authority to check out the two branches by the Ministry of Justice. The officials later submitted a report that stated that, in addition to being illegal, the two branches lacked the appropriate facilities and equipment and were operating principally as institutes for education by correspondence. They recommended that they be shut down.

Shehab recalled at the news conference that he had warned students five times since he became minister against enrolling in "establishments that call themselves branches of foreign universities." Yet the branches responded to each warning by publishing advertisements in newspapers inviting students to enroll.

Shehab vowed that "any unlicensed higher education establishment will be shut down, be it an institute, academy or branch of a foreign university." He said that other branches of foreign universities are currently being checked out "so that similar legal action can be taken against them."

Shehab added that "the government encourages private education — this is why there are private schools and universities — but on condition that they have licences and have the necessary facilities for proper education. According to the Constitution, education at all levels comes under government supervision."

He reassured people that "a legal way out will be found for the students enrolled at the branches that have been closed and each case will be examined on its merits." He suggested that students at the City University branch might be allowed to join the Arab Academy. Shehab did not specify the number of students concerned, but refered to them as a "few".

Students and their families gathered outside the premises of the defunct branches, many of them asking why the ministry had refrained from taking action for so long. At the news conference, Shehab said: "We cannot keep silent for ever. Tolerating a situation that is wrong for a period of time does not mean that we should leave things that way for ever."

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Why the bans?

Prosecutor-General Ragaa El-Arabi, talking to Amira Ibrahim, asserted that his orders banning reporting on certain cases while under investigation were not in violation of press freedom

Earlier this month, Prosecutor-General Ragaa El-Arabi ordered the press and the media to stop reporting the alleged discovery of a prostitution ring in which two cinema actresses were said to be involved.

The ban was the third in the space of a few weeks. Similar bans were issued concerning an investigation by military prosecutors into an attack on German tourists outside the Egyptian Museum and a complaint by Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi against the opposition *Al-Shaab* newspaper for alleged slander. The latter two bans have since been lifted now the investigations have been completed and the two cases have gone to court.

El-Arabi, interviewed by *Al-Ahram Weekly*, said the bans were justified by law to ensure the investigations could be conducted securely and without inappropriate interference. "When I took over my post, I was determined not to impose a single ban under any circumstances," he said. "But when press criticism goes off limits, I have to impose a ban, even though I hate doing it."

According to El-Arabi, the law allows the imposition of a news blackout "in cases of a serious threat to public order, public morals or the conduct of investigations." Reporting on the alleged prostitution ring embarrassed Egyptian expatriates, he said, and in the case of El-Alfi, "I feared that the investigation might be endangered by the publication of alleged information that contradicted the information we had in the case files."

Although he said the press should enjoy "unrestricted freedom", El-Arabi also accused newspapers of usurping the roles of others. "What is happening now is that the press play the role of detectives, chasing after crimes, the role of the prosecution, investigating charges, and the role of courts, passing judgement," he said. "Those are not the duties of the press and, consequently, I ordered the press to stop reporting certain cases."

El-Arabi said the ban does not amount to a news blackout. "It is in force until the investigation is completed and then it is lifted," he said. "I am not the press's keeper, as long as it takes ethics into account and does not make false accusations."

El-Arabi said that although investigation of the alleged prostitution ring was only at an early stage, the suspects had been "condemned as guilty by some newspapers." He complained that a certain newspaper published what it described as excerpts of recorded telephone conversations between the ring's members, at a time when the prosecutors had not even made a transcript of the tapes.

El-Arabi denied that the reporting ban amounted to a revival of censorship. "Absolutely not," he said. "A censor cuts parts of a news story, sometimes the whole story. But this is not what I do. I only order a ban on reporting on a certain subject, issue or case for a limited period of time. This does not harm the right to information. It is my duty to defend society's morals and national security."

While some journalists and lawyers welcomed the ban concerning the alleged prostitution ring, others expressed fear that it could open the door to a revival of press censorship.

Kamel Zoheiri, a former chairman of the Press Syndicate, said that just because one newspaper erred, others should not be punished for its mistake. "Freedom means responsibility," he said. "It is the responsibility of the press to inform society and provide it with facts, whatever the subject."

According to the Penal Code, reporting bans can be imposed in connection with political, military, diplomatic, economic and industrial information related to national security, as well as information related to the investigation of crimes with security implications. "If this law were to be fully enforced, the press would not be able to carry out its duties," Zoheiri said.

Salah Fadel, a law professor, said the Penal Code provisions were unconstitutional because a 1980 amendment to the Constitution had proclaimed the press to be the fourth estate.

Adel Hammouda, deputy chief editor of *Rose El-Youssef* magazine, welcomed the reporting ban related to the alleged prostitution ring. He said the ban should be expanded to cover all prostitution cases. "Most of these cases usually come to nothing in the end and the innocent vicitims cannot respond and defend themselves," Hammouda added. But he was strongly opposed to bans on the reporting of other subjects.

Abdel-Aziz Mohamed, head of the Cairo branch of the Bar Association, was in favour of the recent bans. "As a lawyer, I am against all types of arbitrary behaviour, whether by the prosecutor or the press," he said. "But the press often goes beyond all acceptable limits. Newspapers hold their own trials and pass judgement, and this is unfair to the suspects."

Lawyer Nabil El-Hilali warned that the bans threatened the citizen's right to information and, thus, the interests of society. "The question is how to establish a balance between the interests of society and those of individuals," he said.

Makram Mohamed Ahmed, head of the Press Syndicate, said the news blackouts "produce the ideal environment for the circulation of rumours, speculations and false accusations." Although Ahmed sympathised with "the noble aim of protecting the judiciary from being influenced by the press," he affirmed that "the press has a constitutional right to expose corruption." He also pointed out that there had been cases in the past in which reporting bans had been used to protect certain persons.

The journalists' dilemma

A Press Syndicate Council decision seemed to blame non-unionised journalists for the decline in professional standards. But as Syndicate Chairman Makram Mohamed Ahmed and Council members told Fatemah Farag, the issue is much more complex

On 15 October the Press Syndicate Council, the syndicate's governing body, announced a new series of measures aimed at upgrading the profession's standards. The council's decision was prompted by several complaints from individuals and organisations that they were being blackmailed by persons posing as journalists. The wrath of the Syndicate descended on non-Syndicate journalists, singling them out as the main culprit behind the deterioration in professional standards.

The council urged legal action against all those who work as journalists but are not Syndicate members. Further, the Syndicate asked all chief editors not to employ persons who are not registered with the Syndicate.

The decision, however, appeared to be in obvious contradiction with the Syndicate's own regulations. According to these, one must be employed by a press organisation in order to apply for membership. And yet the Syndicate asked the press organisations to employ only Syndicate members. "It is true that this a problem comparable to whether the chicken came before the egg or the egg before the chicken," said Salah Abdel-Maksoud, a council member. "There are many journalists who have proven themselves good professionals and yet the Syndicate does not accept them, although by working, they are breaking the law which says that anyone working in the field must be registered with the Syndicate."

Makram Mohamed Ahmed, the Syndicate's chairman, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the decision must not be interpreted in isolation from other factors. "This is a part of a series of coordinated measures that are being taken to solve the present problems," said Ahmed. "Of course, I cannot decide today that I am going to tell all the journalists who are working and are not Syndicate members that what they are doing is illegal. There are some press organisations which rely almost solely on such people, and even in party and national newspapers many people work although they have not been officially appointed because of bureacratic problems or lack of resources... We have to find a solution for these colleagues."

Galal Aref, an ex-member of the Syndicate's registration committee, acquiesced. "There is a state of chaos in the profession because there are those who deserve to be Syndicate members, many of them working at national newspapers, but are not admitted for procedural reasons," he said. "We need to reorganise the registration procedures, not only to ensure that only professional journalists are allowed to work, but also to ensure that these journalists are given the necessary protection."

But the problems do not end there. "To implement this decision, the Syndicate will have to check on all the press organisations to make sure they are not employing non-Syndicate members and that they are giving contracts to all staff to make them eligible for Syndicate membership," said Hisham Fouad, an active member of the Syndicate who works for the opposition newspaper *Al-Arabi*. "This would mean incorporating approximately 4,000 journalists who do not have official contracts, or are employed by foreign press offices."

According to Law 79 of 1970 which regulates Syndicate activities, a professional journalist is a person who has a regular job with a newspaper published in Egypt, receives a regular salary and has spent one year in training, if a graduate of the faculty of journalism, or two years for other university graduates. The Syndicate gives special permits to those still in training.

Abdel-Maksoud noted: "When the registration committee takes its decisions, it interprets the law in a stringent manner which I believe is contrary to the law. For example, the law does not prohibit those working for newspapers which are published on the authority of foreign licences from joining, yet the registration committee will not accept them. So fine journalists at *Al-Aalam Al-Yom* or *Al-Usbooe* are not granted membership while secretaries and administrative staff working for national newspapers are allowed to join."

The decision angered many journalists who have been working in the field for years and yet are denied access to Syndicate membership. Lamis El-Hadidi, a columnist for *Al-Aalam Al-Yom*, expressed surprise that the Syndicate would spend so much energy on chastising non-Syndicate members at a time when journalists' freedom is under attack from so many directions.

Many press organisations have taken advantage of the Syndicate's restrictions to employ journalists on minimal wages, without any form of insurance, and reserving the right to dismiss them at any time. "I feel like I am the one who is being punished for things I did not do," said a young journalist who has been working for eight years with a national weekly magazine without being given a formal contract.

"It used to be easier before, when all journalists worked for national newspapers, but now the situation is different... We may find soon that most journalists are working for private newspapers, foreign press offices or newspapers run by political parties," said Aref. He added that though the present law can deal with the new situation adequately, what is needed is a full system overhaul and better management.

Syndicate chairman Ahmed says a precarious balance has to be maintained between freedom of the press and the rights of journalists and society. "I am against the closure of any newspaper, but today there is a flood of small newspapers and magazines. Some of them are very good, others are not. So how do we deal with this situation without curtailing the freedom of the press?" asks Ahmed. He spells out a few guidelines. For example, these newspapers should have a clear administrative and financial framework and be responsible for meeting specific standards in dealing with their staff.

Ahmed mentions that one of the proposals under discussion in relation to the problem at hand is to launch a form of "associate" membership which would allow newspapers to register journalists in training or still not formally appointed.

"Syndicate members should understand that we need to work and that we will take what we can get," said Ayman, who works for *Al-Aalam Al-Yom*. "To protect us and the profession, there should be a unified system which ensures that when people start working for a newspaper, they are not taken advantage of."

Ahmed concludes: "We need to take a stand. Not just the Syndicate, but all those involved in the field ... We have to find legal solutions to today's problems, solutions which are just for all our colleagues in the field."

Why we shouldn't go to Doha



The inexorable link between any economic regional arrangements and political progress on the peace front makes it imperative for the Arabs to boycott the MENA conference, argues **Mustafa Kamel El-Sayed**

The Middle East/North Africa economic conference (MENA) could have been a very useful framework for promoting cooperation between Israel and the Arab states had the peace process progressed along the bilateral approach called for in the peace agreements.

The principle formulated in the 1994 Madrid peace conference was that regional cooperation in areas such as the economy, environment, water, refugees and arms control would proceed alongside the settlement of territorial questions between Israel and the Arab countries.

But very little progress was achieved on the bilateral track. The United States, therefore, decided to take the question of economic cooperation completely out of the framework of multilateral negotiations. While this move was taken in part so that economic cooperation would not be conditional on the need for resolving the outstanding political questions, it was also designed to sideline the EU, which favoured the bilateral approach.

In essence, the US decided to try and take the issue of economic cooperation out of the hands of politicians and entrust it to businessmen.

But while the three so-called Middle East economic cooperation conferences held so far were supposed to be meetings of businessmen, it became obvious that politicians played a major role from the start.

Heads of states and foreign ministers of several countries were present in the three meetings, and they seemed to go along with the US premise of advancing economic relations without any comparable advances in the settlement of Arab-Israeli territorial disputes.

The separation between economic cooperation and progress on political issues did not seem as serious so long as the Labour government was in power in Israel. But since May 1996 and the rise of a Likud government staunchly opposed to the principle of land-for-peace, the continuation of the framework of economic cooperation, which is not linked to any political settlement, became more of an embarrassment to Arab governments.

The Binyamin Netanyahu government's settlements policy in the Occupied Territories was a source of embarrassment for Egypt, which was hosting the MENA conference that year. At first, President Mubarak threatened that Egypt would postpone the conference until progress was made on the political track. While Egypt accepted to host the conference in the end, it did manage to marginalise Israel's role in it.

Egypt's participation in the fourth MENA conference in Doha in November is neither useful nor necessary.

The Egyptian economy has managed to attract foreign investors to the country because of the government's success in implementing the package of stabilisation and structural adjustment policies favoured by international financial institutions, aid donors, and transnational corporations.

Also Egypt is the region's largest market and boasts the most skilled workforce.

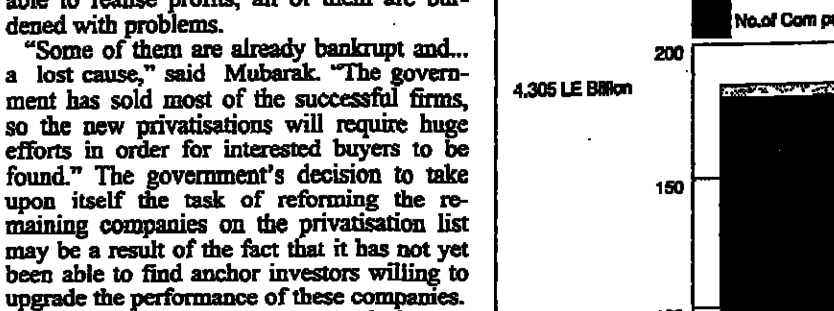
What Egypt gained — other than American diplomatic support for having attended MENA I and II, and sponsoring MENA III — has been trivial. Even this US diplomatic support is restricted by the US Congress' constant critical assessment of Egyptian foreign policy, and threats to diminish annual aid levels allotted to Egypt.

Arab acceptance of participation in Doha is tantamount to the acceptance of the American position that economic cooperation could proceed without progress in the political arena, or that it would facilitate the reaching of a political settlement. But both Egypt and Jordan's experiences have shown that economic cooperation between them and Israel has not been strong enough to push along the peace process.

If all Arab governments succeed in collectively rejecting participation in the Doha conference unless substantial political progress is achieved, they will be taken more seriously by the US and Israel.

If they should decide otherwise, then this will be an acceptance of the American approach to the Middle East question, which undermines the basic formula of the exchange of land-for-peace. It is also an acceptance of the Netanyahu government policy that peace can be achieved without Israel relinquishing occupied Arab lands.

The writer is a professor of political science at Cairo University and the American University in Cairo, and director of The Centre for the Study of Developing Countries.



Privatisation at a crossroads

Egypt's efforts to woo investors into buying the remaining companies slated for privatisation faces three main problems, writes **Gamal Essam El-Din**

Since its privatisation programme began in 1991, Egypt has sold off approximately 80 of its 314 public sector companies, raising from the sales roughly LE5 billion.

But for a programme which saw its best year in 1996, over the last three months it has reached a point of near stagnation.

Last August, the government announced it would divest its interest in 34 companies before the end of this year. However, only two of the firms — Giza Contracting and Real Estate Investment and El-Wadi Agricultural Exports — have so far been partially privatised.

The government's periodic statements on its privatisation plans, however, have not been enough to spark investor interest in the remaining companies — mainly because the most profitable and attractive companies have already been sold. What is left are the debt-ridden and loss-making enterprises. When investors have now expressed an interest, they have done so in the telecommunications sector.

But in a bid to prove to the foreign business world that privatisation in Egypt is not a risk, Public Sector Minister Atef Ebeid announced that the government has recently launched a wide-scale corporate financial and administrative programme in up to 162 state-run businesses slated for privatisation.

"We are now trying to adopt a more pragmatic approach to make these companies more attractive to foreign buyers," before they are sold off, Ebeid told a gathering of businessmen recently.

According to Mokhtar Khattab, Ebeid's advisor, there are a number of reasons as to why the ministry has recently intensified efforts to restructure the remaining public sector companies.

First, the government's efforts over the past three years to improve the financial standing of these companies has begun to show signs of paying off.

Out of 262 companies left on the privatisation list until last June, 109 continued to be profitable, 19 witnessed a turn-around from loss-making to profit-making.

These reforms mean that the number of loss-making companies has dropped from 108 to 82 since the programme truly took off in 1993. The losses netted by these companies dropped from LE3.822 billion in 1995-96 to LE2.539 billion in 1996-97.

Khattab said that the total number of profitable companies has climbed to 180, posting total profits of LE4.305 billion in 1996-97 — up from around 100 companies which realised LE3.963 billion in profits in 1995-96. In total, 262 public sector companies made LE1.946 billion in net profits for fiscal 1996-97 compared to LE141 million in 1995-96.

The financial results of companies which were privatised are equally significant. According to Khattab, 43 privatised companies generated net profits of LE2.4 billion last year.

"Privatisation is not just about the government getting rid of state-run firms. It is a matter of raising efficiency and improving financial and administrative performance," he said.

However, as most privatisation watchers agree, the improvement in the financial position of public sector firms should not blind the government to the fact that it still has a long way to go before the 162 debt-ridden public sector firms are turned around and privatised.

According to Amin Mubarak, chairman of the People's Assembly Industrial Committee, while only a few of these companies may be able to realise profits, all of them are burdened with problems.

"Some of them are already bankrupt and... a lost cause," said Mubarak. "The government has sold most of the successful firms, so the new privatisations will require huge efforts in order for interested buyers to be found." The government's decision to take upon itself the task of reforming the remaining companies on the privatisation list may be a result of the fact that it has not yet been able to find anchor investors willing to upgrade the performance of these companies.

"But as long as the government decided to undertake the reform task itself, it should face up to a huge challenge," said Mubarak.

And to do this, it will have to tackle three main problems: reducing the current workforce by one half, clearing the unsold inventory and settling staggering debts.

To tackle the problem of labour, the cabinet has decided recently to set aside LE617 million of the proceeds from privatisation to implement the first stage of an early retirement programme (ERP) in 41 public sector companies.

In its first stage, the programme targets nearly 154,750 employees in 13 bankrupt and defunct companies and another 28 loss-making businesses. Their salaries cost the government roughly LE1 billion per year.

But the programme, as a whole, will cost the government a staggering LE11 billion if it is to be able to persuade roughly 350,000 state employees to accept early retirement.

To help achieve this objective, the government has asked the Social Development Fund (SFD) to allocate LE400 million for the transfer training of 60,000 public sector employees. This project aims at equipping workers with new skills through training programmes offered in 16 training centers.

But wanting workers to retire and getting them to do so are often conflicting ambitions.

"It is not just a matter of costs. It is [about] fears of the impact this move will have on labour and the social unrest it may trigger," said Ahmed Taha, a leftist MP.

Although the government sought for the last four years to trim down the size of the 1.1 million-strong public sector workforce, it has only managed to bring the number down by 200,000.

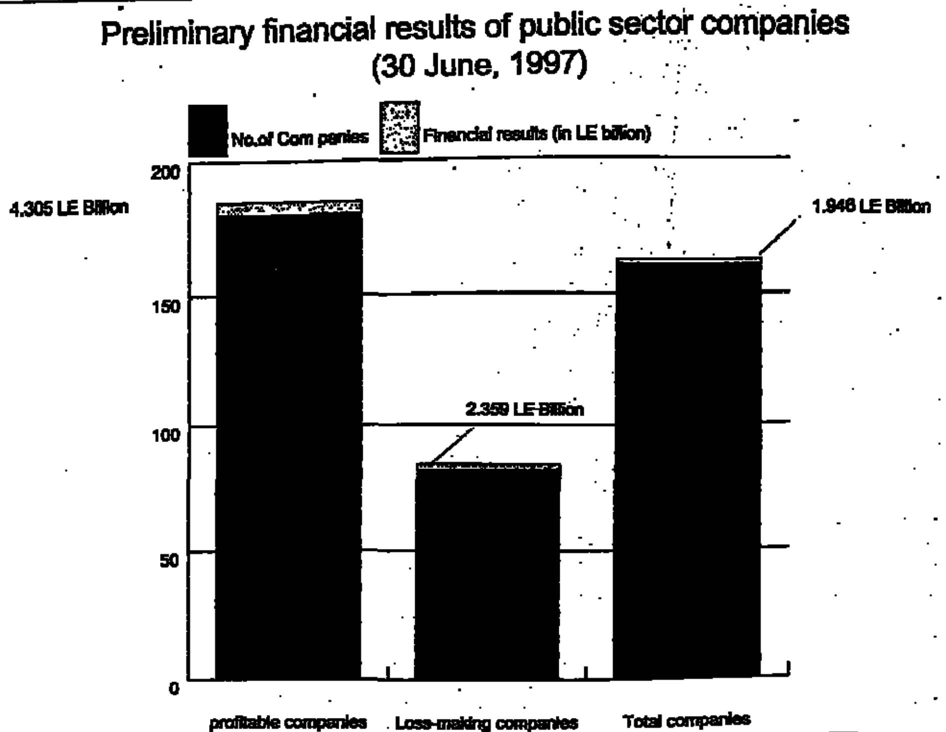
And while efforts to draw workers into early retirement were intensified in 1996, the government is still far from its mark.

For example, Adel El-Shahawi, chairman of the Holding Company for Food Industries, said that only 3,100 out of a total 10,500 workers in six loss-making companies, slated for early retirement, have applied for the programme.

The Holding Company for Chemical Industries had to borrow LE68.8 million from banks to pay 2,300 out of a the 2,883 workers slated for early retirement.

Taha explained that workers resist the programme because the LE18,000 to LE30,000 retirement bonuses are seen as too little. They also feel that the programme does not distinguish between productive and non-productive employees.

The early retirement policy applies to all workers between the age of 45 and 58, "without regard to their skill and efficiency," said Taha.



But full implementation of the retirement programme is a must if the government is truly serious about attracting investors, says the People's Assembly's Mubarak.

"While the government is currently contemplating new, practical policies for the next stage of economic reform, it should also be prepared to contain any socio-political fallout stemming from these reform policies," he said.

Clearing out the unsold inventory of public sector companies is also obstructing privatisation efforts.

Public Sector Minister Ebeid said recently that the value of the six-year unsold inventory has peaked this year, reaching LE4 billion, with the 33 public sector spinning and weaving companies accounting for about LE1.5 billion of the total figure.

The unsold inventory includes huge amounts of raw materials, spare parts, manufactured goods not purchased because of low-quality, poor marketing policies, a lack of modern export strategies, outdated technology, protectionist policies and wide-scale dumping and smuggling practices on the Egyptian market.

According to Mubarak, it was Law 203 of 1991, known as the privatisation law, that put the spotlight on the problem of unsold inventory, along with a host of other problems previously ignored. While this law gave public sector managers the freedom to sell-off the unsold inventory, even at reduced prices, they took no actions "fearing that they would face charges of misappropriating public funds," said Mubarak.

This inventory is not only a financial burden on companies, but also reduces the government's power in negotiating good privatisation deals on these companies, he said.

Egypt's industrial sector needs LE30 billion in order to dispose of the unsold inventory and to develop a competitive edge in today's global economy, said Mubarak.

The third problem which confronts the privatisation programme is that the majority of the remaining public sector companies are riddled with debt.

In 1993, the year in which the privatisation programme took off, public sector companies owed a total of LE66 billion — LE30 billion to banks and LE36 billion to suppliers. This figure has dropped to LE16 billion.

Much of this debt reduction has come about as a result of efforts by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri's government, which recognises that debt is probably privatisation's biggest obstacle. In a recent cabinet meeting, officials decided to earmark LE2.4 billion of the proceeds of privatisation to pay off debts owed by 162 companies to banks.

Ebeid also announced that he will hold a series of meetings with the chairmen of major public sector banks over the next three months to reach a final debt settlement deal.

So far, only the National Investment Bank (NIB), the single largest creditor of public sector companies, has made significant progress towards reaching settlement agreements with its debtors.

NIB has agreed to drop interest rates on debts owed by 13 companies and to transform debts owed by an additional 11 companies into capital contributions. The government has also recently taken a major step towards paying off the debts of spinning and weaving companies, as well as El-Nasr Contracting Company (Hassan Allam), which, together, are estimated at LE5.5 billion.

Mokhtar Khattab said that the Public Sector Ministry, in conjunction with the Central Bank of Egypt, will issue long-term bonds to refinance the debts to banks. The move is a result of strong objections raised in parliamentary and economic circles to using privatisation funds to pay off debts.

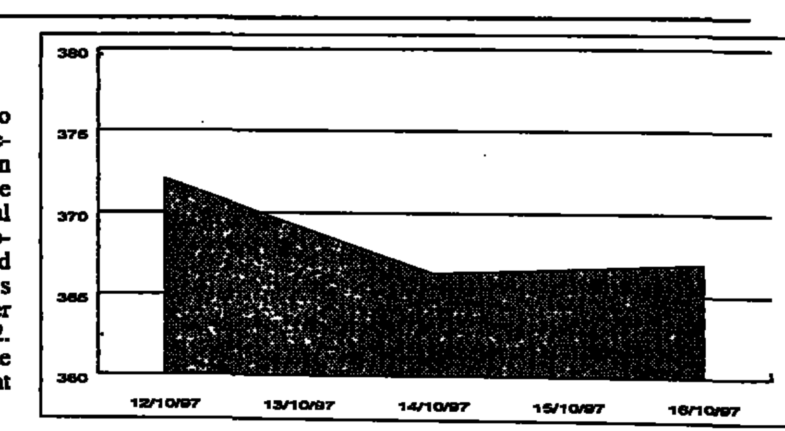
Tawfik Abduh Ismail, chairman of the Assembly's Planning and Budget Committee, said that bond issues are a practical solution to the problem, provided that adequate guarantees are offered to the bond buyers. If not, he said, "this solution will mean a switch from indebtedness to banks to indebtedness to the bond buyers."

Market report The slide continues

The Egyptian Capital Market Index edged down over the week ending October 16, losing 6.75 points to close at 366.94. Moreover, the market witnessed a sharp decline in overall turnover which reached only LE330.39 million, compared to LE756 the previous week. Market experts attributed this continuation of last week's fall-off to investors holding back funds in anticipation of a number of new privatisation issues due in the near future. These expected offerings include major stakes in Misr Aluminum Company and Alexandria Iron and Steel.

Nile Ginning company topped the market this week. With one of its major shareholders divesting his stake, transactions in the shares accounted for 20.29 per cent of overall market activity. Shares worth LE67 million were traded, though the stock price plunged by 4.4 per cent to close at LE53.

It was also a busy week thanks to the holding company for Construction and Electricity Distribution floating off about 90 per cent of the shares in its subsidiary Industrial and Engineering company. Egyptian Expatriates for Investment and Development was the market's biggest gainer, managing an 18 per cent increase to close at LE32. Egypt Chemical Industries took the greatest loss, falling12.74 per cent to close at LE20.



More export growth

EGYPT is aiming at encouraging export-oriented products suited to meet the needs of foreign markets, said Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri in remarks during the inauguration of an Egyptian exports exhibition this week. The exhibition includes products from 300 public and private sector companies.

Although the quality of Egyptian products has improved tremendously over the last year, marketing still remains a basic problem confronting the country's exports, he said.

As a result, the government is considering the establishment of local and joint-venture marketing firms, in addition to enlisting the help of foreign marketing companies.

The exhibition, scheduled to run until 24 October, includes products by the textile, electronics, engineering, mineral and wood industries.

Yearbook for stocks

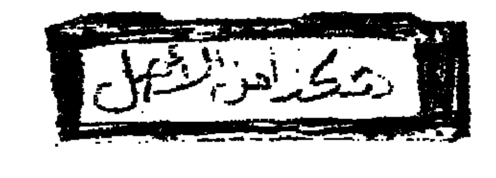
INVESTORS in the Egyptian stock market now have a reliable stock exchange yearbook that provides them with necessary data on listed companies.

The book, published by a private company and sponsored by the Egyptian Stock Exchange and the Commercial Investment Bank's investment arm, the Commercial International Investment Company (CIIC), includes profiles of both actively and inactively traded companies. It also includes balance sheets, income statements, the share performance over the last four years and key financial ratios. It also presents full information on the 15 investment funds registered in Egypt.

Publishing a yearbook is a tradition in all international stock exchanges, said Josse Dorra Fiani, president of Fiani and Partners, the book's publisher. The Egyptian stock exchange used to publish an annual directory of the performance of companies listed. But the book was stopped with the start of the nationalisation movement in the 1960s.

Yasser El-Mallawani, managing director of CIIC, said that this new book is like a data bank on Egyptian companies listed on the exchange. It will be a trusted and reliable source of information for both the local and foreign investors.

Readily available information on market and economic trends plays an important role in the government's plans to boost GNP growth and attracting foreign investors. The yearbook, said El-Mallawani, helps fill this need by aiding investors in understanding the reasons behind share price fluctuations in Egypt, and by serving as a guide for long-time and new investors in the Egyptian market.



Below is the full text of the speech delivered by Foreign Minister Amr Moussa at the inauguration of the Peres Centre for Peace in Tel Aviv

'A message to the people of Israel'

Mr President,
Mr Perez,
Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is always a pleasure, indeed a duty, for us Egyptians to support all efforts and to participate in all events which promote the attainment of peace in the Middle East. The inauguration of the Peres Centre for Peace is an event worth attending, in particular at this difficult juncture in the life of the peace process.

Shimon Peres... I thank you for the invitation... I thank you for all that you have done for peace, I congratulate you on this occasion, particularly on behalf of President Mubarak.

We have differed... we have at times quarrelled; we did not agree with several of your policy lines; you criticised some of ours... but we never questioned your credentials as a peace proponent, promoter and advocate. We worked together with you and with late Prime Minister Rabin to ensure that peace — as agreed — shall at the end prevail.

Mr President,
Ladies and Gentlemen;

Let me seize this occasion to deliver a message to the people of Israel... a message about peace... our common goal.

We have just heard from President Weizman that peace does not happen... we have to work for it.

Peace is a very noble endeavour... it needs noble people to work for it, and to let it happen... it is too precious... too important a goal for all of us, to let wither away, by tolerating policies or practices which endanger the Peace Process, or by allowing the negative forces on all sides to carry the day. We in Egypt are very serious and determined about the peace process. We have initiated this process... The Egyptian-Israeli Treaty bears the perfect formula, which puts the principle of land for peace into full and honest implementation. It is this formula that will always succeed... nothing else will.

When we talk about peace, we talk about justice... about fairness... about security... about withdrawal... about normal relations... about respect for the rights of peoples... about respect for the commitments of governments. In short, when we talk about peace, we talk about the visionary statesmanship that sees beyond the clouds of today... even tries to dissipate them, and lead people on the right track... towards a future of coexistence, of cooperation, of openness and transparency, of stable relations and open borders, of mutual recognition, of mutual benefits. *This is the peace we are talking about.* No other definition of peace will work.

Mr President,
Ladies and Gentlemen;

We have heard today hopeful sentiments about the vision of the peace to come. But let us come down to earth. The Middle East stands today at a very dangerous crossroads. Never has the credibility of a peaceful settlement been questioned as it is today. Never, since Camp David, or since Madrid, has the quest for peace witnessed such a deep crisis. Never since the Madrid conference — of October 1991 — when the principle of land for peace was emphasised, has the process witnessed such a debacle, a decline, and a loss of credibility as it does today.

It is a major challenge and a major responsibility for all of us to reverse this side and restore faith. And I must tell you... it is your government that bears the greater share of responsibility in restoring this faith that has been lost because of negative policies. It is not our intention nor is it necessary to trade accusations ... yet, we cannot hide the facts, and we say this in the candor of a peace partner whose objective is the achievement of a just peace for all.

To erode the territorial viability of the West Bank and Gaza, or of the Golan Heights for that matter, through the confiscation of land or the building of settlements, is to erode the possibility of reaching a just and workable settlement, in fact it is to erode the possibility of reaching any settlement at all... who can bear such a responsibility?

To delay the implementation of the agreements reached, is to render them meaningless, and to send a negative message to all concerned, Syrians, Lebanese and of course the Palestinians and to all of us in the region... telling them not to rely too much on understandings reached or agreements signed.

To deprive the Palestinian people of even the hope in a different future... is to close all avenues for conciliation and peaceful relations... let us not forget that despair and frustration are the midwife to violence.

We need a time out. A time out of this despair and frustration; a time out of acrimony and recrimination; a time out of negative policies and violations. We need no more settlements, no more terrorist attacks... but no more collective punishment either, no more meaningless redeployments, no more unfulfilled promises.

We condemn in the strongest terms any and all acts of terrorism and violence. Innocent Israeli and Palestinian men, women and children must be immune from the scourge of such acts. A man deprived of his wife, or a wife of her husband, parents of their child, or a child of his parents, is utterly criminal and unjustifiable... it makes no difference whether they are Palestinians or Israelis. The safety and security of either is the safety and security of the other... all human life is sacred. At the same time the means of life should also be sacred. The insecurity of a Palestinian, feeling that his or her home may at any time be demolished, is a scourge that must equally be stopped.

Let people feel safe and secure... all people... on both sides of the current divide.

Let none of us create a negative climate... then blame the other side for the consequences.

Mr President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Security is a crucial and elaborate issue for all of us in the region... but its meaning should not be confined to combating violence. The true meaning of security is far broader and much deeper than personal safety which can be protected by police or other measures. Much as this is vital, it is but one element of the true comprehensive meaning of security. Security is not an exclusive concern of one state or one society. It has its base in the establishment of just peace and the *launching of peaceful relations. It is intertwined with issues* of arms control and weapons of mass destruction. It has to address the concerns of all parties, excluding no state and no weapon. The concept of security needs an honest and comprehensive review... and until this is done, the issue will remain untapped.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Another issue, very much on the agenda currently, and very much dear to the heart and mind of Shimon Peres, is regional economic cooperation.

This is unquestionably an important issue, for it is regional cooperation, in all its aspects, that will cement just, lasting and comprehensive peace, in fact it will make peace lasting and comprehensive and help deepen its roots in the Middle East.

However, we have to be honest with ourselves and with each other. This issue emanates from and is still dependent upon the peace process and its developments.

Hence you see the reluctance of many Middle East partners to attend the Doha conference, contrary to Casablanca, Amman and Cairo. The policy of the government of Israel has to reconsider many of the aspects of its performance pertaining to the peace process, in order to save this important concept. The ball is in the Israeli government's court. We say this in all candor and honesty.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we said before, peace does not just happen, it must be based on principles and guidelines.

To ensure peace with justice in a comprehensive way, a number of equal principles must be fulfilled; must be protected, promoted and respected:

1- The respect for the principle of land for peace;
2- The rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination;
3- The right of all states to live within secure and recognised boundaries;
4- The possession of weapons of mass destruction must be reconsidered;
5- *Regional security must be achieved at the lowest* level of armaments;
6- The security of one party should be linked to, and not be at the expense of others;
7- Terrorism and violence, *in all their forms, must* never be resorted to;
8- Provocative policies and brute force which kindle the fire of frustration and despair, must be abandoned;
9- The rule of law and international legitimacy must be respected at all times;
10- The principle of balanced obligations and commitments should be the guiding mantle. And agreements must be faithfully respected;
11- The policy of settlements must be rescinded;
12- Disputes should be settled by peaceful means.

I recall what President Sadat said and emphasised ... "No more war"... we have to talk, we have to negotiate... but we have to be honest.

The road ahead of us is a long and challenging one... *it requires* leadership with a high sense of responsibility and statesmanship and an unwavering commitment to the spirit of peace.

The issues we have to address are difficult, but not impossible... and they have to be negotiated, including the issue of Jerusalem. They must be negotiated honestly, against the backdrop of faithful, bona fide implementation of all that we have agreed upon.

Mr President,
Shimon Peres,
Ladies and Gentlemen;

As I have said before, we are now at a crossroads. We have one option, and one option only, that is the *establishment of just peace. Our duty therefore is to salvage the peace process.*

Comprehensive peace is our collective responsibility. It is the responsibility of the states of the region, of the peoples of the region, and indeed of the international community. This gathering and this centre and its like, should stand up to any party, without exception, that tries to roll back our achievements or deprive us of the ability to reach a just and lasting peace which can usher in a new Middle East.

I know that the majority of the Israeli people, like the majority of the Arab people, long for this peace and dream of a region in which reconciliation and cooperation replace hostility and animosity.

So, from this Centre which is dedicated to the quest for peace, I address this majority of the people of Israel:

I know that you do not wish for your future generations to have to walk down the streets carrying *automatic rifles instead of school books... and you are right.*

I know that you do not wish to live in a region where your neighbours bear grudges and ill feelings towards you, instead of friendship and good will... and here also you are right.

I know that you do not seek to ensure your security and well being at the expense of being unjust to other people, rather than through reconciliation and the rule of law .... and here again you are right.

I know that you do not aim to tarnish the history of the Jewish People with the stigma of an occupier who causes misery to other peoples or nations... again... you are right.

We hold the same convictions.

I therefore invite you to shoulder your share of our *collective responsibility and to work with us, we are ready to* work with you, for a peace based on justice, fairness and equality.

I invite you to work hand-in-hand with your Arab neighbours *towards beating the "swords into plowshares,* the spears into pruninghooks, so that nation shall not lift up sword against nation, nor shall they learn war any more."

Let our goal be to close once and for all the file of animosity between Arabs and Israelis. After all we are cousins... aren't we?

Thank you.



Moussa: I invite you to work hand in hand with your Arab neighbours towards beating the "swords into ploughshares, the spears into pruninghooks, so that nation shall not lift up sword against nation..."



Israeli President Weizman attempting to placate Amr Moussa, infuriated by Danny Abraham's offensive remarks about the Arab countries



From left to right: Danny Abraham, the main funder of the Peres Centre, Israeli President Weizman, Amr Moussa, Mr and Mrs Peres

"We need a time out. A time out of this despair and frustration; a time out of acrimony and recrimination; a time out of negative policies and violations. We need no more settlements, no more terrorist attacks... but no more collective punishment either, no more meaningless redeployments, no more unfulfilled promises."

Searching for Israel's 'peace camp'

The peace camp in Israel may be angry with the obstructionist policies of Binyamin Netanyahu. But its motives and aims are not as clear cut as might be assumed, as Dina Ezzat found out

In an amply-bedecked ballroom of the Tel Aviv Hilton, a large group of Middle Eastern and Western dignitaries, officials and businessmen gathered Monday evening for the inauguration of the Peres Centre for Peace — a "non-partisan and non-governmental organisation", carrying the name of former Prime Minister Shimon Peres, which *aims* to encourage regional economic cooperation, regardless of the current deadlock in the peace process.

Outside the hotel, as the participants were arriving, another group was assembling on the pavement — a group made up of ultra-Orthodox Jews in their traditional black costumes and other opponents of the peace process, carrying placards denouncing Peres.

Inside, Foreign Minister Amr Moussa delivered a strongly-worded speech, denouncing Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's policies of building Jewish settlements on occupied Arab land and denying Palestinians their basic rights.

"It is a black day for Tel Aviv when Amr Moussa comes here and tells us *what to do*," muttered one of the participants.

As the first ever seminar held at the Peres Centre was winding up, a group of ultra-Orthodox Jews was trying to force their way into the court of Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem to lay what they believe will be the foundations of the third Temple of Solomon.

Also in Jerusalem, Netanyahu was celebrating his birthday. On this occasion, he received the blessings of the chief rabbi, who prayed for God to save him and keep him on his path.

"What Netanyahu is doing is for us," said a Tel *Aviv taxi driver. "He is right in what he is doing."*

According to the driver, the prime minister may be making some mistakes on domestic issues, "but he is dealing with the Arabs in the right way because we don't really understand what it is that the Palestinians want. This is the land of Israel," the driver said.

"Certainly, any opposition to Netanyahu is generally due to local issues and not the result of his anti-peace policies," said an Arab Tel Aviv-based diplomat, who *asked for his name to be* withheld. "Sometimes, the Israeli people say that they are against Netanyahu. And sometimes, Netanyahu seems to be facing serious threats that might get him thrown out of office. All that is very true, but Netanyahu will never be brought down just because of the deadlock in the peace process."

Another Arab diplomat agreed. "There are forces for peace in Israel, but they are never as vocal as the extremist Jews and certainly they are not as influential," he said. "They would never demonstrate on peace issues in as forceful a manner as the right-wing Jews. As a matter of fact, they don't really care that deeply about the rights of the Palestinians or Arabs; they just want to make sure that Israel will not go to war again That is why they are angry with Netanyahu."

Currently, there are some 20 peace-oriented movements and parties in Israel. They all say they want to have *peaceful* relations with their Arab neighbours, including the Palestinians, and some even accept the idea that ultimately there may be a form of Palestinian "statehood." However, they also all agree that this state must be unarmed and should not have any part of Jerusalem as its capital.

Yossi Sarid, chairman of the left-wing Meretz Party, is one example. He is very angry with Netanyahu's policy on the peace process, which he believes is making things "very *miserable*" for the Israelis. As he put it in an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, "The sea is stormy."

In Sarid's opinion, the region is moving steadily towards another cycle of Arab-Israeli bloodshed — "a war" — but he argues that this is not only because of Netanyahu's lack of commitment to the Oslo agreements or his policies of extending Jewish settlements and imposing collective punishment on the Palestinians. For Sarid, Arafat is not doing enough to fight "terrorism" and he should shoulder his share of the blame along with Netanyahu.

Members of the peace camp in Israel sometimes try to encourage the Likud coalition government to honour the Oslo commitments. But when they do so, it is because they believe, as Yossi Beilin, the Labour Party's deputy leader put it, that a "weak Arafat is a strong [Islamist *militant*] Hamas, and a strong Hamas is bad news."

Yet members of the peace camp are prepared to concede that peace has a price: "a fixed price," said Sarid. This price, he explained, is giving the Palestinians land and self-rule, withdrawal from the Golan Heights with maximum security arrangements, and withdrawal from southern Lebanon, an area which has become a veritable "trauma for the Israelis." In return, he said, the Israelis will expect to be guaranteed a peace that includes open borders with Arab states, maximum trade facilities and numerous regional water and power projects.

The question is whether the peace camp is both able and sufficiently determined to do whatever is necessary to make Netanyahu change his policy. Foreign Minister David Levy has threatened to resign on more than one occasion. Some Israeli politicians believe that this could be the "domino blow" that brings down the present government. *But they also concede that* Levy might not be prepared to be the only one paying such a high price — the loss of his post — in order to try and get Netanyahu to soften his policy.

"Resignation is a difficult decision for a politician to make; the politician may take this fateful step and get nothing out of it," one Israeli politician who asked that *his name* be withheld observed.

In his speech at the Centre's inauguration ceremony, Peres said: "There is something that I want to tell my Israeli friends here: that peace has a price. If we wait, we will pay a higher price."

Asked by the *Weekly* to explain what he meant by a higher price, Peres replied: "More mistrust, less sympathy and less support."

Moussa angered

AT ONE point during the Centre's inauguration ceremony, Foreign Minister Amr Moussa threatened to walk out in protest against a statement by Danny Abraham, a Jewish American and one of the Centre's principal financial backers. Moussa was angered by Abraham's declaration that all the Arab states, with the exception of Iraq and Libya, were ready to make peace with Israel.

Moussa publicly chastised Abraham in front of Israeli President Ezer Weizman, telling him that *his* statement was an *"offence to* this occasion and this gathering for peace."

Moussa said that but for Weizman's presence, he would have walked out in protest.

M. KHODEIR P.O.BOX 1057, CAIRO 11511, TEL:418-0034/418-0035 FAX:418 28 63



Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu lifts up a decorated Torah during a birthday visit to Rabbi Yitzahk Kadouri (R) as they both celebrate birthdays last Tuesday. Netanyahu is 48 and Rabbi Kadouri, a mystic rabbi with a large sephardic Jewish following, is in his nineties. Last Friday, Netanyahu said he hopes to forge a compromise on the thorny topic of Jewish conversion that will satisfy both Israel's Orthodox establishment and the more liberal US Jewish majority *(photo: Reuters)*

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu is facing trouble not only in peace talks with the Palestinians, but also with his own religious allies at home over the question "Who is a Jew?" **Graham Usher** writes from Jerusalem

Netanyahu in a fix on 'who is a Jew'

If the "Misha'al affair" soured relations between Israel and such diplomatic allies as Jordan and Canada, there is another controversy simmering which may literally cause schisms between Israel and the Jewish diaspora, especially among the five million or so Jews who live in the US. This dispute is less over Netanyahu's bizarre helmsmanship of the peace process than over the question, "Who is a Jew?"

World Jewry is broadly divided into two religious streams, Orthodox and non-Orthodox. Of the latter, the two principal tendencies are the Reform and Conservative movements, which emerged in Germany and America in the 19th and 20th centuries in reaction to much of Jewish or *halacha* religious law which many European Jews saw as anachronistic in the modern world. For the same reason, Orthodox Jewish movements have historically viewed their Reform and Conservative offshoots as at best "heretical" and at worst "pagan".

The Reform and Conservative movements have few followers in Israel, a fact reflected in the practice that only conversions performed by Orthodox rabbis are recognised by Israel's Interior Ministry. But the Reform and Conservative movements wield considerable influence in the US, where an estimated 88 per cent of all Jews are non-Orthodox. In deference to this crucial political constituency — which is the backbone of the "Jewish lobby" and forks out around $50 million a year in private donations to Israel — Israel has maintained a policy of recognising Reform and Conservative conversions as long as they are carried out "abroad".

It was a compromise that satisfied neither the Orthodox nor the non-Orthodox, but it kept the peace. It may not do so much longer.

As part of his "coalition agreement" with Israel's three main Orthodox parties (which, between them, have 23 MKs in the 120-member Knesset), Binyamin Netanyahu pledged to encode in law the Orthodox rabbis' monopoly over conversions in Israel. Reform and Conservative rabbis reacted in fury, viewing the legislation as an attempt by Israel's Orthodox Chief Rabbinate to delegitimise their brand of Judaism.

To fend off the threat of a schism between the Orthodox movement at home and the non-Orthodox movements in America, Netanyahu, in June, set up a government committee to look into the conversion law. Made up of Orthodox and Reform and Conservative rabbis and headed by Israel's Finance Minister, Yaacov Neeman, the committee's remit was to find a compromise on conversion that would be amenable to all streams.

On 14 October, the Israeli press leaked details of the "compromise" and unleashed a minor earthquake among the Orthodox parties. According to the reports, the committee is recommending that a religious college be established in Israel run by representatives of the Orthodox, Reform and Conservative streams of Judaism. These would select and train conversion candidates whose final conversion, however, would be performed according to "Orthodox norms". The committee also proposes that marriages carried out by Reform and Conservative officials be from now on recognised in Israel on condition that they are "supervised" by delegates from Israel's Orthodox Chief Rabbinate.

Reform and Conservative rabbis cautiously welcomed the proposals. But they were dismissed as "horrible" by Aryeh Deri, political leader of the Sephardi Orthodox movement, Shas, which, with 10 MKs and two ministers, is the strongest religious party in Israel. Deri gave Netanyahu an ultimatum. "We will demand that Netanyahu gets two laws passed [the conversion bill as well as a second law that would bar Reform and Conservative Jews from sitting on regional 'religious councils' in Israel]," said Deri. "Should the laws not be passed, then this government would not have a reason to continue, and it would be wrong for us to take part in it". It was a stance echoed by Israel's main Ashkenazi Orthodox party, United Torah Judaism (UTJ), and by the far-right National Religious Party (NRP).

Netanyahu got the message. Following a meeting last week with Shas and other Orthodox MKs, he caved in to the ultimatum. While hoping that a compromise could be reached via the Neeman committee, the Israeli leader promised to support the second and third readings of the conversion law when they come before the Knesset next month. Reform and Conservative rabbis were outraged. "The message that is coming from [Israel's orthodox] Rabbinate is that Reform and Conservative Judaism is not Judaism. If this is now confirmed by the Israeli legislature, this will have horrendous consequences," said Rabbi Uri Regev, leader of Israel's Reform movement.

To complicate matters further, two members of Netanyahu's ruling coalition — the Russian immigrant Yisrael Ba'aliya and Third Way parties (which have 11 MKs between them) — have made it known that they support the "Neeman compromise" and will either vote against or abstain on the conversion law.

These factions have yet to be exploited by Israel's Labour-led opposition, mainly because it is no more united than the coalition over how to deal with the conversion crisis. While the secularist Meretz bloc has denounced the conversion law as "religious coercion", Labour leader, Ehud Barak, has been more circumspect, urging only that the bill be "frozen" to prevent a breach within Judaism. Barak's reticence is understandable.

Ever since his victory as leader in July, Barak has been trying to steer Labour toward the centre of Israeli politics, wooing Likud's Sephardi constituencies and, especially, their main political tribune, Shas. Last month, Barak publicly (and, some would say, ineptly) apologised to Israel's Sepharadi communities for 50 years of discrimination at the hands of Israel's Ashkenazi establishment.

Shas, too, has made it known that it is not averse to an alliance with Barak, especially on policies pertaining to the Oslo process where Shas's pragmatic stance is closer to Labour than it is to Likud and the NRP. But such a rendezvous will come at a price. It was spelled out in a "personal address" to Barak by Shas's spiritual guide, rabbi Ovadia Yusuf, last week. "The Labour vote on the conversion bill will be the touchstone of your [Barak's] sincerity," said Yusuf. "It will show whether your heart was really in the right place when you begged the Sephardi community's forgiveness."

If he wants to be Israel's next prime minister, Barak will be no more able than Netanyahu to resist Shas's ultimata, regardless of the damage this will inflict on both their Jewish constituencies in the diaspora.

10-year-old launches Qana Website

A 10-year-old Lebanese boy, who was outraged by the 1996 Israeli shelling of Lebanese civilians in Qana, decided not to let their memory be forgotten. **Zeina Khodr** reports from Beirut

Tragedies often leave imprints that are hard to erase. The 'Qana Massacre', in which more than 100 Lebanese were killed after Israel shelled a UN refugee camp in south Lebanon, is just one example. While tragedies often touch the hearts of many, only some people decide to act. Rami Jachi, a 10-year-old Lebanese boy who was shocked and outraged by the gruesome pictures of the carnage at Qana, is trying to make a difference.

Rami has created a home page on the Internet in a bid to raise awareness on the plight of the survivors of Qana and at the same time generate money for those in need.

"I felt sad for the people. It really was a tragedy. The pictures were so horrible that I started to cry the first time I saw them on television," Rami recalled. "That's why I have started a campaign on the Internet to help the survivors of the massacre, many of whom lost their whole families. The lives of the survivors and the relatives of those who died in the massacre have been turned upside down. With the Qana campaign, I want to try and bring some semblance of normality to these peoples lives."

It all started when Rami received an application from the Bangkok-based Near East South Asian Board School, NESA, to encourage youngsters to be more active in their own communities. "I thought for weeks for a suitable topic. Then it occurred to me that the impact of the 1996 Qana massacre would be the ideal community service because the people involved in the massacre needed help, particularly the children," Rami told the *Weekly*. "It has been over a year since the massacre occurred, but these kids still need help whether physical or mental. I felt that I could help them. People use the Internet all around the world and they could see for themselves what exactly happened."

Two survivors will be interviewed each month. There will be information about their way of life, whether or not they have jobs, or if they need any money or assistance. The addresses of the organisations where donations can be sent will be listed on the site. Rami, along with his friends, visited some of the survivors because he wants them to be given the opportunity to tell their own stories. Saddalah Balhas lost 14 members of his family in the massacre. "All the money in the world will not bring back my family," Balhas told Rami. "Thank you for thinking about us. All we want is the world to realise the crime Israel has committed," he added.

Israel launched a barrage of shells into the UN base on 18 April 1996 and more than 100 civilians, men, women and children who were taking refuge in the base were killed. Israel said the bombardment was an "unfortunate mistake". A UN report concluded that the shelling of the base was "unlikely to have been the result of gross technical or procedural errors although this could not be completely ruled out".

Rami also met two young girls. 10-year-old Lina and eight-year-old Dana who are now unable to speak after suffering head injuries. Their parents do not have the money to continue their treatment. Lina underwent surgery and was hospitalised in London for six months. "We would be grateful for any kind of assistance. Lina lost her father in the massacre," Lina's mother, Mounira Tire told the *Weekly*.

Rami is still in the process of completing the site on the Internet but it already has information as well as pictures of the massacre. "I included news reports on the attack to cater to the needs of students and journalists. I spent weeks choosing the best and most accurate articles. I also included photographs of the massacre in the hope that visual images would further inspire people to help."

Funds will be raised through the sale of T-shirts and other items. The shopping centres where these goods can be found are also detailed on the site. A few of Rami's friends are helping him in his campaign to raise funds for the survivors, particularly the children. "We will be helping Rami design T-shirts, and all the money raised will be used to buy toys for the children of Qana as well as other goods they need," nine-year-old Wessam said. His classmate Nadfine added: "We want to make the lives of these children normal. We want them to live like other children."

Rami's parents are from the village of Jouaiya which is on the front-line in southern Lebanon. Rami has never lived there. He was born and spent his first six years in the United States. "I do not visit my hometown often because of the ongoing conflict in the south. But I understand the suffering endured by the residents there," Rami, who holds an American passport, said.

Two weeks after the massacre, Rami asked his parents to take him to the gravesite. "I really wanted to go. I wanted to see for myself what happened. It affected me so much that I started to cry when a United Nations peace keeper was showing us around the base which was targeted by Israeli gunners." Rami's future plans include organising outings and field-trips for the children of Qana. They should be given the chance to go where other children go. We will be planning future projects," Rami said.

Rami's campaign has just started and he concedes there is a long way to go before his objectives are met.

"I am optimistic," Rami said. "I expect it is only a matter of time before moral and financial support will be forthcoming."

Rami's campaign will not stop here. By the end of next year, Rami plans to start helping orphans. "After Qana 96, we have decided to expand and help orphans. This new site will be on the Web sometime in 1998. Our community needs help and we should be there for them."

For those interested, the Internet address of "Qana 96" is: web.cyberia.net.lb/Rami.

Libya's case before The Hague

Libya managed to bring its dispute with the US and Britain concerning the Lockerbie bombing back into international focus this week by arguing its case before the International Court of Justice. **Rasha Saad** reviews the latest developments in the 9-year-long dispute

The International Court of Justice ended eight days of hearings yesterday further to a Libyan request to claim that the United States and Britain were acting unlawfully in demanding the extradition of two Libyans suspected of bombing a Pan Am flight in 1988 which exploded over Lockerbie, Scotland killing 270 people.

The Libyan attempt is the latest move in a concerted effort to lift the five-year-old UN air and arms embargo against Tripoli. The United States and Britain pressured the Security Council to approve sanctions against Libya in April 1992 for refusing to hand over the two Libyan suspects for trial in either the US or Britain. Libya argues that the Security Council has been turned into a tool for serving US interests.

American, British and Libyan lawyers took the stand twice over the past eight days under the jurisdiction of the United Nations court to present their cases. The Court's decision, to be announced in February or March 1998, will be limited to whether or not the international judicial body has jurisdiction to hear Libya's request. Libya is claiming the right to try the suspects in its own courts.

Despite the lengthy legal procedures and the uncertainty of the result, observers believe that Tripoli managed to score a moral victory by putting its arguments, which are supported by Arab and African countries, before the world body and the international media.

Libya reiterated its readiness to try the two suspects by a special tribunal in The Hague or at any third neutral country other than the US or Britain. Tripoli maintains that the two suspects will not receive a fair trial in either of the two countries due to their political differences.

The Libyan stand has reportedly led to a division among the families of the Lockerbie victims who now seem more willing to back the offer for a trial in a neutral country. Libya also argues that it has no extradition treaties with either the US or Britain and that its laws prevent handing over Libyan nationals to foreign countries.

But the case that Libya was trying to make in front of the Hague-based Court was that the US or Britain, by insisting that the two suspects should be tried in any of the two countries only, were violating the 1971 Montreal Convention on Unlawful Acts against Aircraft. Libya says that the Montreal Convention is the only international agreement signed by the three countries. The Convention states that in cases of civil aviation crimes or terror attacks, disputes could be settled in either the country where the incident took place, the country which the aircraft belonged to or the country where the suspects originally came from. Libya believes that by investigating the case it has fulfilled its obligations under the 1971 Montreal Convention, and that it has the right to try the two suspects in local courts. Libya pointed out that the US was also violating the Montreal Convention by refusing to cooperate with the local authorities in investigating the Lockerbie bombing.

Libyan law professor Abdel-Razeq Suleiman, in arguing his country's case on Friday in front of the world court, accused the US and Britain of exploiting the Lockerbie bombing for political ends. "The reactions of the two states after the tragic explosion at Lockerbie are explained by geopolitical and ideological reasons," Suleiman said. "They have little to do with the reality of the actual facts," he added. Arab and Libyan observers believe the US sanctions over Tripoli were actually a punishment for its staunch opposition to the Middle East peace process and its alleged support of certain groups listed by Washington as "terrorist organisations."

US and British lawyers concentrated their arguments in front of the UN court, by claiming that the International Court of Justice had no jurisdiction to rule in a case already handled by the Security Council.

In a telephone interview from Tripoli with Ibrahim Legwell, lawyer of the two Libyan suspects, he told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that this round of hearings at The Hague is the second in four years.

Legwell said that Libya had first asked the International Court of Justice to apply the Montreal Convention on the Lockerbie case in March 1992. The Court then primarily accepted the case and Libya presented its first official report in December 1993. It then took the Court another 18 months to answer back in 1995. The Court, being laden with other cases, set a date of October 1997 to look into the case.

However, Legwell sounded quite optimistic about the hearings. He believes that Libya has a good case to prove that the Court has the right to rule on the Lockerbie issue.

During the hearings, he said, Britain and the US acknowledged the validity of the Libyan interpretation of the Convention and agreed that Libya has legal jurisdiction. They also agreed that Libya has the right to call for their cooperation and that Libya is not committed to hand over the suspects. "They only rejected the jurisdiction of the Court because they claim that the Court should only deal with cases of dispute between countries, which is not the case in the Lockerbie issue," said Legwell.

He also refuted US and British arguments that the Court of Justice had no jurisdiction to look into the case after the Security Council had approved sanctions against Tripoli. Legwell said that according to the UN Charter, the Court and the Security Council could deal with one issue at a time. He gave an example citing the case of the US hostages who were held inside the US Embassy in Tehran shortly after the successful Islamic Revolution in 1979. He said both the Court and the Security Council were involved in the issue.

Commenting on reports that the families of the victims were now leaning towards accepting the Libyan offer of trying the suspects in a neutral country after long years of waiting without results, Legwell said that this was a "positive step". He said that he had received letters from some American families who approved of the Libyan suggestions.

Legwell added that by accepting to try the suspects in a neutral country, Libya was already offering a concession in order to solve the problem. "The rule is that the suspect should be tried by a judge from his homeland, one who understands his language. We have conceded in terms of our clients rights to the limit that justice is still maintained. We tried to avoid a biased jury [in the US or British courts] who might have been influenced by the pre-trial publicity," he said.





Primakov visit

RUSSIAN Foreign Minister Yegeney Primakov is scheduled to arrive in Beirut tomorrow, Friday, on the first leg of a regional tour that will take him to Jordan, Syria, the Palestinian self-rule areas, Israel and Egypt. The foreign minister's talks with the various leaders will tackle Russia's role in pushing forward the Middle East peace process, reports **Abdel-Malik Khalil** from Moscow.

Primakov's trip to the Middle East coincides with unconfirmed reports back home that this might be his last mission as foreign minister. Primakov, however, has denied these rumours and insisted that he was committed to his post and his strategy of increasing Russia's influence in international affairs.

Egypt will be Primakov's last stop before returning to Moscow. He is scheduled to meet with President Hosni Mubarak and Foreign Minister Amr Moussa on 30 October.

The Russian foreign minister did not attend the Egyptian-Russian summit held in Moscow late last month because of a trip to New York to attend the UN General Assembly meeting. But in his country's speech in front of the Assembly, he emphasised the importance of collective efforts to keep the peace process going. Primakov also pointed out that Washington's attempt to monopolise the Middle East peace process created more obstacles than solutions.

Primakov also met Moussa in New York after the Egyptian-Russian summit in Moscow, and has personally contributed to the final joint communiqué on the Middle East peace process issued by President Mubarak and President Boris Yeltsin.

In the communiqué, issued before Mubarak left Moscow, both Egypt and Russia called for doubling international efforts to overcome the obstacles confronting the stalled peace process. The statement also highlighted the necessity for implementing all previous commitments between the Arabs and Israel. They also concluded that both states — with Russia co-sponsoring the peace process with the US and Egypt as a key promoter in the process — will work together to overcome problems and to keep the peace talks alive.

Arab countries hope that Primakov's visit will mark renewed Russian involvement in the Middle East, especially at a time when the region's politics come fourth on the list of Russian foreign policy priorities, after the Commonwealth of Independent States, China and Eastern Europe.

Algeria appeal

"THOUSANDS of people — women and children, the poor and elderly — have been massacred in Algeria with unspeakable brutality," said a joint statement from Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the International Federation of Human Rights and Reporteurs Sans Frontières last week. The four organisations that work for human rights and press freedom called on the international community to overcome its "wall of silence" and lead a probe into the massacres and other human rights abuses in Algeria.

The organisations have called for an international investigation to ascertain the facts about the violence, collect testimonies from victims, witnesses and officials and make recommendations.

At least 80,000 people are estimated to have been killed in Algeria since the start of the conflict between security forces and Islamist insurgents in 1992, the organisations said. Beyond massacres, the joint statement added, extra judicial executions, arbitrary killings, torture, rape, disappearance and hostage-taking have become routine.

The statement noted the failure of Algerian authorities to investigate abuses and the government's rejection of any outside help, claiming that it would constitute interference in its domestic affairs. But it said that in the domain of human rights, "Algeria is not above international law" and "should welcome... international attention aimed at helping to protect lives."

Omani vote

OMANI women on Saturday expressed disappointment with their performance in the Gulf State's consultative council elections after only two outgoing female members were re-elected.

For the first time, women throughout the country were eligible to stand, but there were only 27 female candidates out of a total 736 that were nominated by the electoral college. In the previous council elections, only women from the capital Muscat were allowed to be nominated.

Electoral college voters selected 164 candidates from the 736 in Thursday's poll. Sultan Qaboos will choose 82 candidates from the pool of 164 in December, which will be the final 82-member Majlis al-Shura, or consultative council.

Tayba Al-Mawli, a former radio announcer, received the largest number of votes, 478, in Al-Sib province. The other woman selected was former Foreign Ministry official, Shakur Al-Ghumari who won 171 votes.

"Women only accounted for 10 per cent of the 15,000 members of the electoral college and that proportion is too low," said Zakia Hassan Ihsan, a losing candidate.

In spite of the disappointments, Oman's elections this year were a milestone in the Arab Gulf states for their expanded participation of women. Kuwait, for example, has an elected parliament but women are not allowed to vote. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates have all-male consultative councils made up of designated members.

After presidential elections in 1995, and voting for parliament in June, Algerians will today elect members of their local councils in the last step of a process intended to legitimise the current government's rule. **Hesham Fahim** reports from Algiers



A militant of Algeria's National Democratic Rally Party (RND) pastes a poster on an election billboard in Algiers *(photo: Reuters)*

Zeroual's 're-legitimisation' hopes

Sixteen million Algerian voters were expected to turn out today to cast their votes in what are only the second multi-party local council elections to be held since independence in 1962. The first local council elections were held in 1990, when they were won by the now outlawed Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). They were the FIS's first step towards power, which should have been consolidated by their victory in the first round of parliamentary election in early 1991. But the Algerian army intervened and cancelled the results of the vote, for fear that the FIS would turn Algeria into a strict Islamic state.

The Algerian government of President Liamine Zeroual hopes that today's elections to local councils and provincial authorities will complete the process of re-legitimising the democratic institutions following the army's intervention in 1991. The first step in that direction was the presidential elections held in November 1995. In June, Algerians chose members of the legislative council, or parliament. In both elections, FIS members were not allowed to run, after an earlier court ruling banning the group.

The local council elections are seen as more important than the two previous elections, because members of those councils are the ones who deal with the day-to-day needs of the Algerian people. Local councils have the authority to deal with routine problems such as unemployment, health, environment and education. According to observers, these problems are among the ingredients that make up the ongoing conflict and violence in Algeria.

The importance of local councils was clearly felt after the cancelling of the 1991 elections. Those councils that should have been controlled by the FIS were dissolved, and it was those areas that have since then witnessed the worst violence. Members of the FIS in areas like Sidi Mussa and other localities near Bleida have allegedly led the violence against the government in order to protest at the dissolution of their councils and the direct appointment of council members by the state.

The Algerian government also hopes that success in organising today's elections will help it to present a positive image of the situation in Algeria to international public opinion and in particular to its foreign partners, building on the government's claims of recent success in solving political and security problems. Security is indeed a prime concern during these elections, particularly following the series of horrific massacres that have descended upon Algeria since the parliamentary elections in June. The Algerian government believes that the massacres have been aimed at distorting the government's image and to undermining the trust of its foreign partners by showing that it had failed to solve the current crisis.

Nearly 80,000 candidates belonging to 36 political parties, besides dozens of independent candidates, are taking part in today's elections. Yet the most prominent among them are those belonging to the ruling coalition that emerged after June's elections. The coalition includes President Zeroual's party of the National Democratic Rally (RND), the Islamic-oriented Movement for a Peaceful Society, previously known as Hamas, and the former ruling party in Algeria, the National Liberation Front (FLN). Next on the list in order of importance are the Islamic Nahda Party, the Socialist Forces Front (FFS), the Rally for Democracy and Culture (RCD) and the Workers' Party. Those are the same main parties which competed in June's parliamentary elections and whose deputies currently sit in the legislative chamber.

Among the major parties boycotting the elections is the Republican National Alliance led by former Prime Minister Reda Malek. He has protested against the procedures for holding the elections and doubts that they will make any real difference to the situation in Algeria.

Most Algerian parties, whether big or small, were keen to take part in the local council elections after recognising their importance, for fear of losing what influence they may have in Algerian politics once and for all.

Although campaigning has taken place under tight security, most parties were able to explain their views on how to stop the bloodshed in Algeria and how to improve the services provided by local councils and provincial authorities. According to observers, the campaigning period which lasted for 20 days was a success, considering the number of parties taking part and the number of rallies held. Five candidates belonging to Hamas, the FLN and RCD were killed during the campaigning. But this did not noticeably affect the general atmosphere of the campaign, and most rallies passed off calmly under heavy police protection

Many Algerians are expected to turn out for voting today in what the government hopes will be an expression of their rejection of terrorism and violence and their longing for peace and security. Like previous elections, observers expect that participation will be low in the capital and higher in smaller towns and rural provinces. Those regions enjoy more security and stability than do areas in central Algeria, including the capital, where some of the worst massacres have taken place in recent weeks.

The security measures being taken to ensure the voters' safety are those associated with any Algerian election: the closing of weekly markets, banning of trucks carrying commodities, a day's holiday for schools and postponing any sporting events. Nearly 700,000 polling officers will organise the vote in more than 1,500 centres. There is also a local elections monitoring committee in which all parties fielding candidates will take part, to make sure that no irregularities are committed during the poll.

Kurdish vacuum courts disaster

Rival Kurdish factions in northern Iraq remained committed to a shaky cease-fire as the US-brokered peace talks failed to reach a settlement, writes **Omayma Abdel-Latif**

"The zealous *peshmerga*, the real sons of these people, confronted the enemies like lions, opened fire on the aggressors and taught them a lesson they will not forget. The coward Jalalis left scores of their dead behind.." This is but one of several fiery reports aired by the Kurdistan Democratic Party's (KDP) radio on a daily basis since last week's eruption of fighting between northern Iraq's two main Kurdish factions; the Patriotic Union Party (PUK), led by Jalal Talabani, and Masoud Barzani's KDP.

The messages coming from PUK-radio, on the other hand, spoke of "removing the pockets of treason and mopping up the occupied areas of Kurdistan."

For five days, fighting raged between the KDP and the PUK with both sides reporting territorial gains and heavy, unconfirmed numbers of casualties. The US intervened immediately and called upon both parties to observe a cease-fire they had agreed a year ago and to get back to the negotiation table. American, British and Turkish mediation teams convinced both parties to agree on a cease-fire on Friday.

Although both parties continued to uphold the shaky cease-fire and have started an extensive round of peace talks in Ankara earlier this week, an overall settlement of the conflict remained a far from real prospect.

Sami Abdullarahaman, a leading KDP member who was among the KDP's negotiating team, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the situation was "open to all kinds of possibilities."

The fighting erupted only a few days after the two parties ended a new round of US-brokered peace talks in London in mid-October. The talks were meant to cement the agreement they reached in September 1996 after a similar round of extensive fighting.

Fighting began when the PUK claimed that Turkish warplanes, backed by Barazani's KDP troops, bombed its strongholds near the towns of Shaqlawa and Khelifa.

In retaliation, the PUK fired six Russian-made missiles at Barazani's headquarters in Salahuddin on Thursday. The Turkish raids were part of its incursion into northern Iraq aimed at eradicating Kurdish rebels belonging to the Kurdish Workers Party, PKK, who are seeking a separate state for the Kurds in Turkey. The PKK has maintained good ties with Talbani's PUK.

The talks which were held after achieving the cease-fire on Friday had no direct results, however, they were overshadowed by PUK's accusations against Turkey of violating its status of impartiality as a sponsor of the negotiations.

Turkey has denied the accusations and reiterated claims that the PUK was collaborating with the PKK. Turkish military sources said that the PKK was receiving logistical support from the PUK as well as from Iran and Syria.

"In reality only the US and the UK can be considered as co-sponsors of the peace process. The government of Turkey has become a party to the conflict, as it has attacked and bombed Kurdish towns and civilians and it cannot be considered neutral," Shazad Saib, head of the PUK office in Ankara, told the *Weekly*.

But sources in Iraqi Kurdistan revealed that it was not only Turkey which showed no genuine interest in maintaining the peace process between the two Kurdish factions, but also both the US and Britain must share the responsibility for the recent clashes.

"The sponsors really have to take part of the blame for the conflict. If the Supervisory Peace Monitoring Group (SPMG) [which meets in Ankara and comprises representatives from Turkey, Britain and the US, as well as Kurdish and Turkmen parties] had taken a strong position, this recent outburst could have been avoided," Saib added.

He also accused the sponsors of behaving inconsistently. "Privately, behind closed doors, the three governments and the SPMG say that there is no doubt that the PUK started this fight, but up till now they have not made any public statement. Stagnation in negotiations last year brought catastrophe to the peace and if they allow the same stagnation, it is likely to have dangerous effects," he pointed out.

The recent fighting came under heavy criticism from Baghdad which accused the two Kurdish factions of "seeking the help of foreigners, an act which would not help the ambitions and aspirations of the Kurds," said one government-controlled Iraqi newspaper.

Helping the Kurds, the newspaper added, was far from the real intentions of the US administration and its interests in the region. The same was the case with Iran and Turkey, which have sent their forces across the border several times to crush their own opponents.

However, the picture remained bleak after a series of meetings which were held during the week and which failed to make adequate steps in the direction of reaching a settlement.

Observers were sceptical that such a shaky cease-fire, underlining the fragile security situation in the area, would lend momentum to the efforts exerted to install peace in Iraqi Kurdistan.

MED-TV, a London-based Kurdish TV station, reported on Monday that both the KDP and PUK representatives have engaged in a war of words and no settlement has been reached. "The PUK and KDP representatives were asked to halt the clashes. But the PUK representative had many conditions to this request," MED-TV reported.

"The PUK wants to make it clear that withdrawal from their present positions is conditional and must coincide with the withdrawal of the KDP from the cities and towns captured during the cease-fire."

Summing up the situation, Kurdish writer Diyar Gekhsi wrote in the *Kurdistan Observer* that both parties are to be blamed for the eruption of fighting which he said was mainly due to the dangerous political vacuum "inviting disastrous consequences for the whole nation".

Women fight for peace

Sudanese students revolt against forced conscription while their mothers call for an end to war, writes **Gamal Nkrumah**

The civil war in Sudan has demolished schools, hospitals and whatever else there was of modern life in southern Sudan. In the north, schools have become the engines of opposition to the war effort of the ruling National Islamic Front (NIF) government headed by Hassan Al-Turabi.

The NIF has tried to keep Sudanese women in the shadows, but the women have also been at the vanguard of the struggle to build a new civil society in Sudan. Mothers of the conscripted students, are spearheading the struggle to stop the enlisting of students. Women took to the streets in Omdurman and Khartoum last week to protest at the conscription of school boys. Mothers fought street battles with the police who resorted to spraying the demonstrators with tear gas.

According to the independent Sudanese daily, *Al-Khartoum*, a 38-year-old woman, Naima Abdul-Rahman, suffered a fatal cardiac arrest when police sprayed her with tear gas. There were other unconfirmed reports of student deaths because of police brutality.

Sudanese Minister of Defence General Hassan Abdul-Rahman Ali praised the police clampdown of the protesting students and their parents. Ali commended the conscripted students and declared that up to five million Sudanese students are to be conscripted in the next few months. In a speech to the Sudanese National Assembly, Ali also said that the conscripts will be dispatched to the battlefields in the south and east of the country. He said that the deployment of high school students in the war against the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) was justified because of the great shortage of regular troops.

"The deployment of students is necessary because of acts of foreign aggression being waged against Sudan since last January. We need to train more young people so that they can join in the war effort to defend the homeland," Ali told the Sudanese parliament.

He also disclosed that all male students under the age of 18 are to be registered so that when they reach the age of 18 they can be forcibly conscripted. "Anyone who will try to evade conscription will be caught and will pay a hefty fine and be severely punished," Ali warned. He added that "those deemed unfit after thorough medical examinations will be attached to government departments to do their national service."

However, opposition forces believe otherwise. Farouk Abu Eissa, chief spokesman for the National Democratic Alliance, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that "the students were not given the necessary military training. Many students were snatched from their parents home, while others were either seized on the streets and public squares or pulled from private cars and public transport vehicles and taken away to military training camps without notifying their parents or guardians."

Abu Eissa also pointed out that the Sudanese government fears a student uprising. "Past experience has shown that Sudanese students played a crucial role in triggering two successful popular uprisings that brought down military dictatorships in 1964 and 1985. During the last few years, the regime has had to brutally quell numerous student protests, frequently resorting to closure of the universities and schools. Therefore, the indefinite suspension of university education and the forcible conscription of students were meant to achieve the twin objectives of neutralising the students and ensuring the continuation of the civil war."

It is widely believed that hundreds of conscripted students have been escaping the battlefields and Ali himself conceded that, "72 conscripts fled from Khartoum airport to avoid being flown to the southern battlefields." Other observers believe that high-level officials do not want to send their sons to the battlefield and are sending them abroad instead. Indeed, students are the only category of Sudanese who do not undergo severe restrictions to travel abroad. Many suspect that the children of the top officials, who can afford the exorbitant air fares, are sent abroad on the pretext of pursuing higher education in order to avoid military service.

"The NIF is not promulgating a law to stop students leaving the country precisely because the high-ranking officials probably want to get their own children out of the country," a Sudanese student leader who recently escaped conscription and is now hiding in Cairo told the *Weekly*.

Ali claimed that students who undergo military training are "disciplined and prove to be very competent fighting men." He gave the example of a group of high school conscripts who fiercely engaged a SPLA battalion and seized a large number of tanks and ammunition after they won the battle."

Leading opposition figure Mansour Khalid told the *Weekly* that "the conscription of students is a criminal act." Khalid, special emissary to the SPLA leader John Garang in Africa and internationally, added that, "the main aim of conscripting students is to use them as human shields. The NIF really does not need students to fight in their battles. Indeed, I suspect that the government is using students as cannon fodder so that public opinion in the north shifts against the SPLA when the parents realise that far too many of their children died at the hands of SPLA troops. The government is bent on igniting hatred and revenge in the population at large. It is a deliberate tactic and a heinous crime," Mansour said.

Garang has recently issued orders for the creation of a safe passage for students to flee the battlefields. He called on all fighting students to give up their arms and take to the escape routes and safe passages provided for by the SPLA. "With the assistance of international humanitarian organisations, the SPLA will be quite capable of rehabilitating the conscripted students," Garang said last week.

"The regime appears to have spared female students from compulsory military service. However, it has striven to persecute and terrorise them in other ways. A number of female students of Al-Ahfad Women's University were recently arrested and flogged for wearing trousers. Female students at Gezeira and Khartoum universities were subjected to a similar ordeal a few weeks ago," Eissa said.

Edited by **Khaled Dawoud**

Al-Ahram Weekly

Healing the sky

The health and environmental risks of ozone depletion are enormous if no action is taken and yet governments continue to prevaricate, writes **Jooneed Khan** from Montreal

Healing the sky. Literally. This mission took on renewed urgency last month when the Ozone Secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme met by the St. Lawrence River to mark the 10th anniversary of the Montreal Protocol.

This international treaty, aimed at banning substances that deplete the Earth's protective ozone layer, was signed in 1987 by 25 countries and the European Community meeting in Montreal.

Studies showing excessive thinning of the stratospheric filter at the poles, and linking this phenomenon to increasing rates of skin cancer and eye cataracts, global climate change, and damage to key ecosystems, have since brought more and more countries to ratify the agreement.

In 1990, a Multilateral Fund was established, to which developed countries would contribute funds to assist the developing countries in reducing and ultimately eliminating their use of those industrial substances that are responsible for the lethal harm done to the ozone layer. Further ratifications soon followed.

Some 110 of the 160 signatory governments attended the 10th anniversary meeting and, prodded by scientist's prognostications and the activism of environmental NGOs, they attempted to shorten time-tables and tighten restrictions on the production and use of several destructive man-made ozone depleting substances (ODS).

The major culprits were already targeted in the 1987 Montreal Protocol, the best known ones being chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) which are used as aerosol propellants, and in refrigeration and air-conditioning systems.

An international ban on the manufacture of CFCs, which are extensively used in food industry refrigeration systems, came into effect on 1 January 1996. The only remaining supplies are stockpiles that already exist and those made available by the recycling of used refrigerants.

Demand by the food industry to ensure operation of its refrigeration systems has raised the price of available CFCs. Trade is only allowed in CFCs recycled under licence, but the restrictions have triggered a vast smuggling business in virgin CFCs, putting pressure on governments to monitor and punish violators.

According to the Environment Investigation Agency (EIA), a private group, some 10,000 tonnes of smuggled CFCs transiting via Europe swamped the South Florida market between 1994 and 1996, robbing the US of more than US$110 million in tax revenue.

A new licencing system for controlling trade will become effective at the start of 2000. According to the final communiqué of last month's meeting, it will be based on licences issued for each import and export, and on regular information exchange between the signatory parties.

Another decision adopted by the 9th Meeting of Parties (MOP) in Montreal "requests developed countries to consider banning the sale of their stockpiles of virgin CFCs anywhere in the world, except for meeting the basic domestic needs of developing countries or for exempted essential uses" — by asthma patients, for example.

Two lesser known villains, methyl bromide and halons, were prime targets of both the 9th MOP, and of several of the environmental groups attending the parallel NGO conference: "Consolidating Environmental Debts: Planning for Ozone Recovery." Methyl bromide (MB) is a pesticide that is injected into the soil before planting fruits such as strawberries and grapes, or vegetables such as tomatoes. It is also used to eradicate pests in storage facilities, stockpiled commodities and agricultural shipments.

Because it is a poison which can damage the neurological and reproductive systems, the US Environment Protection Agency (EPA) classifies methyl bromide as among the Category I acute toxins — the most deadly class of substances.

According to the Pesticide Action Network (PAN), methyl bromide is also a powerful ozone depleter. A UN scientific panel estimated that MB is responsible for 5 per cent of worldwide ozone depletion. The 1987 Montreal Protocol froze consumption of MB at 1991 levels.

Last month's meeting agreed to move towards the phasing out of MB by developed countries between now and 2005, with exemptions for "critical uses". The deadline had previously been set at 2010. Interim reductions of 25 per cent by 1999, 50 per cent by 2001, and 70 per cent by 2003 were also accepted by the developed countries, who are the main MB producers.

Developing countries, previously committed only to a freeze by 2002, have agreed to a 20 per cent reduction in use of MB by 2005, and a total phase-out by 2015. In addition to $10 million agreed last year for funding demonstration projects to test the feasibility of MB alternatives, the Multilateral Fund will make $25 million per year available in both 1998 and 1999 for activities to phase out MB in developing countries, according to the final communiqué.

As for halons — organic compounds derived from methane and ethane that are used as fire suppressants in hand-held fire extinguishers and as extinguishing agents in static fire-fighting equipment — they are 10 times more destructive of the ozone layer than are CFCs.

The 1987 Montreal Protocol froze halon use at its 1986 level. As of 1992, fire-fighting plant and equipment filled with halons has had to be dismantled and disposed of. Yet in 1994, the EPA in the US found that halons were "among the most ozone-depleting chemicals in use today", adding they would be banned before the end of the century.

Halons were not mentioned in the final communiqué of the 9th MOP, though the Australian delegation declared that "existing controls on halons are not adequate" and urged that "now is the time for the parties to address the threat". ECO, the newsletter of the parallel NGO conference, urged "the parties to put halons at the top of the agenda for the 10th MOP", scheduled for next year in Cairo.

In 1992, the protocol was extended to cover halogenated CFCs and CBCs (chlorobromocarbons). Use of the latter has been prohibited since 1996, while use of the former is set to reach zero by the year 2030.

"A timid step where leadership was required," said Beatrice Olivastri, spokesperson for Friends of the Earth International (FoE), in assessing the results of the 10th anniversary meeting of the Montreal Protocol. "We expected governments to renew their support for vigorous efforts to protect public health and livelihoods from increased UV-radiation. Instead, we've witnessed a diplomatic game where no one won and the planet and her people lost," she added.

The Canadians and the US wanted to phase out the use of MB by 2001, but the Europeans were set on 2005. And while the EU wanted to move up the phasing out of HCFCs, the US refused to budge, she noted.

She blamed Mexico, Egypt, Kenya and Tanzania for scuppering a more acceptable deadline than 2015 for the phasing-out of MB use by developing countries. Deprived of government leadership, she said, environmental NGOs will have to "use market instruments", by calling on retailers and consumers to boycott fruit and vegetables grown with methyl bromide.

"The amount of misinformation and alleged influence peddling is astounding, given the handful of companies we're dealing with on methyl bromide. Imagine what we'll have to take on at the December meeting in Kyoto on climate change, which involves both a broader set of issues and the global industrial complex," said Brent Blackwelder, president of FoE-US.

"There should be a big difference between marketing and corruption," he added, "and it is clear that methyl bromide producers and users don't realise the difference." In its closing statement, the parallel NGO conference called on UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to take immediate steps to ensure transparency and accountability in the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements. "We must have written disclosures of all material contributions in cash and in kind to delegates, observers, advisers and employees of relevant agencies," the statement said.



A year after race riots that rocked St Petersburg, Florida, both blacks and whites say that little progress is being made in reducing the differences between them. The race riots were sparked off when a grand jury pronounced a white policeman innocent after he killed a black motorist *(photo: Reuters)*

Yeltsin bows down to communists

Threatened with a vote of no-confidence, Boris Yeltsin bowed down to Communist demands, reports **Abdel-Malek Khalil** from Moscow

The Russian government and the Communist-dominated Lower House (Duma), came to an agreement on Monday — seemingly averting a major political crisis and a potential vote of no-confidence in the Yeltsin administration scheduled for Wednesday. "The executive and legislature were able to agree on all the main questions," Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin said after a meeting between President Boris Yeltsin, Gennady Seleznev, the speaker of the Lower House and Yegor Stroyev, the speaker of the Upper House.

Chernomyrdin, who threatened to resign if he was given a vote of no-confidence, declared that he was satisfied and said that the negotiations had been "very constructive".

Yeltsin, who held further meetings with the opposition on Tuesday, said that he believed the meeting would bring immediate stability. For a while, Yeltsin's administration was in real danger of facing a vote of no-confidence. The demands of the Communists centred around the desire to democratise the political process, which meant agreeing to expand the spheres of consultation between the President and the premier. Yeltsin was also forced to agree to expand consultations between himself, parliamentary speakers and the leaders of other smaller parties within the Duma. These consultations will, in the future, take place at a "roundtable" reminiscent of Russia's past feudal era.

Seleznev said a government-parliament commission had also agreed to examine the Communists' demand for measures to soften the impact of a cut in housing subsidies, and consider the options for compensation for savers whose deposits were wiped out by inflation and the economic reforms in 1992.

There are 450 members of the Russian Parliament with full voting powers. Half of the lower house's 450 deputies must vote in favour of a vote of no-confidence to be passed. The Russian Communist Party — the main leftist opposition group has 146 votes. Our Home is Russia Party commands 65 votes and seldom votes against the Yeltsin administration. The far right political parties in the Duma possess, between them, 51 votes and the liberal right wing movement Yabluka has the support of 41 members. The People's Authority Party, a left-wing group headed by Luganov possesses 39 votes and finally the Agrarian Party, an ally of the Communists, has 33 votes.

President Yeltsin's administration's economic policies have also come under heavy criticism recently. Grigory Yavlinsky, the leader of the free-market opposition party Yabloko, stated that he would only call a truce if the government changed its proposed tax code,

Although the Communists are the largest political grouping in the Russian Duma, they can only muster around 217 votes including the support of the Agrarians and other leftist allies. This means they also need an alliance of convenience with either Yabloko or one of the other parties. However, for the time being, it appears that Yeltsin has yet again manoeuvred himself out of a potentially uncomfortable position.

As the desert closes in

The rules of the game must change to fight desertification, writes **Sajini Dularamani** from Rome

Desertification is hardly a recent phenomenon. The effects of land degradation have been felt across time, from the plains of China to the peaks of the Inca Empire. The world's first written story, a Sumarian epic, tells of a man who brought a curse upon the land by felling the forests of Mesopotamia. In the fourth century BC, Plato compared his native Attica to "the skeleton of a body wasted by disease". Today, the once prosperous Roman breadbasket in North Africa is largely desert.

Desertification is a natural part of the earth's development, however there are indications that the recent phenomenon of global warming may have speeded up the process. Over-cultivation and over-grazing, deforestation and poor irrigation practices, combined with economic and social pressures, ignorance and war, are among the many causes of desertification.

The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) estimates that over 250 million people are directly affected by desertification, with a further one billion, almost one fifth of the world's population, at risk. Of the nearly 3,600 million hectares of land available for cultivation in the world's dry and semi-arid areas, 70 per cent is described by the UNEP as either degraded or subject to desertification. These figures are sobering when one considers that desert accounts for only seven per cent of the Earth's surface.

Africa and the Middle East have borne the brunt of many of the effects of desertification. In Africa, 73 per cent of the drylands are degraded, while in the Middle East, approximately 35 per cent of the land is subject to soil erosion of an unsustainably high level.

However, desertification is by no means confined to this region. Similar results have been recorded in Central and South East Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America. Many developed countries, including the United States and Australia, have also been effected.

At the Earth Summit, which was held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, an international regime was established to help deal with the Earth's worsening environmental condition. Following on from that summit, 122 governments and international organisations met in Rome last week to discuss the implementation of the 1994 UN Convention to Combat Desertification. This convention has since been ratified by 113 of the 115 signatories. Japan and the US refused to ratify the document.

Last week's Rome meeting was exceptional in many respects. Of particular significance was a determination by the parties to see the removal of all obstacles standing in the way of the implementation of the convention. The meeting also set a precedent by holding an "open dialogue" plenary session, during which members of non-governmental-organisations (NGOs) and government delegates cooperated for the first time in formulating possible future responses to desertification.

Community involvement is one of the principle objectives of the convention. The document adopts a democratic, bottom-up approach to solving the problem of desertification, and seeks to involve those communities bearing the brunt of its effects. It is envisaged that these local communities will participate alongside multilateral organisations, NGOs, government officials and donor countries, playing a key role in the formulation of a series of National Action Programmes.

At the heart of the approach outlined in the convention is the establishment of a mechanism for promoting and rationalising the transfer of financial and technological assistance. This mechanism will be overseen by the Rome-based International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and will work in close cooperation with the UNEP. The World Bank, as well as a number of other development organisations, are also set to play a role in a process that aims to equip the people of the drylands with the tools they need to help themselves.

At an organisational level, last week's Rome meeting adopted a resolution to establish a permanent secretariat in Bonn, Germany, as well as formulating a 1999 work plan and approving a US$6.1 billion budget. To deal with the technical aspects of the solution to the problem, the convention has established a Committee on Science and Technology, vice-chaired by Egyptian Ministry of Environmental Affairs advisor, Salah Tahoun.

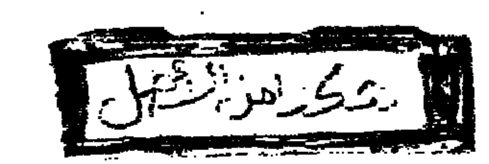
While the convention theoretically binds its signatories to the courses of action it will ultimately propose, actually implementing it is certain to prove a challenge. "It is in the hearts of men that deserts are created, and it is here that the war has to be won," said Hama Arba Diallo, executive secretary of the UNEP, at one of the meeting's outreach workshops.

If desertification is to be successfully combated, effective long-term strategies, not short-sighted economic considerations, must be heeded, the workshop was told. Notions such as economic rationalism, free trade and global economics have little to contribute to this truly global problem, it was suggested.

Pierre Rabbi, of the International Crossroads for the Exchange of Practical Applications for Development (ICEPAD), warned that the pressures of the global economy are having devastating effects on the poorer parts of Africa, exacerbating the already entrenched effects of desertification. The rules of the game, he said, must be changed. Instead of waging war on the world's limited natural resources, he continued, the international community must adopt strategies that work within the constraints of nature and respect the needs of indigenous communities.

Stein Bie, director-general of the International Service for National Agriculture Research (ISNAR) at The Hague, agreed with this approach. Recent technological advances, particularly in the field of genetic engineering, combined with a greater understanding of traditional methods of water conservation, have a significant role to play in a new approach to this age-old problem, he said.

Ultimately, the success of the convention depends on whether or not donor and recipient countries live up to their written commitments. The predicted arrival of a powerful new El-Nino over the African and Asian continents, which threaten to usher in severe drought conditions, will perhaps serve as an alarm bell for the international community.



No longer the battered wife

The recent royal visit to India and Pakistan underlined that much has changed in the fifty years since independence. **Mansoor Mirza** casts a critical eye over Britain's post-colonial role in the sub-continent

The British Queen's recent visit to India and Pakistan was plagued with controversy and official snubs on a scale never witnessed before. The nature of the controversy has brought into question Britain's role in the affairs of the two post-colonial states.

During the recent royal tour, the idea of a "special relationship" between Britain on the one hand and India and Pakistan on the other was frequently bandied about. But what is this special relationship? One between master and slave, exploiter and exploited, or as one London commentator has described it, one between a violent husband and his wife?

Yet whatever metaphor you choose, the talk of a "special relationship" can easily obscure the otherwise obvious fact that Britain has chosen to target India in terms of trade relations for some very normal reasons. Britain does not currently do 3.5 billion pounds worth of trade with India every year because of preferential treatment generously granted to its former colony, but because it is in Britain's economic interests. According to the London *Daily Telegraph*, the curiously-named Anglo-British Initiative signed in 1993 between India and Britain is set to increase trade to 5 billion pounds by the year 2000. The first 3.5 billion pounds of trade have been so immensely profitable to both sides, that great efforts are now being exerted to make 5 billion a reality. Nowhere along the line, however, are there any favours or concessions being offered because of past ill-treatment and exploitation. Yet surely Britain has a responsibility to support the development of her former colonies and provide them with technical assistance?

The first fifty years of independence has seen three wars fought between India and Pakistan. The transition from the status of colony to independent sovereign nation-state has been at the very least a bumpy ride. However, with the arrival in power of Nawaz Sharif in Pakistan and Inder Kumar Gujral in India — the first with a huge majority, the second at the head of a fragile coalition government — the two countries have begun a long-awaited process of normalisation of relations. Both leaders are committed to strengthening trade, cultural and transport links, so as to belatedly repair some of the damage done by the mass exodus of 1947, when communities, families and lives were split in two, just as the sub-continent was itself.

This new chapter in Indo-Pak relations can largely be attributed to the trouble and strife that has been such a dominant part of sub-continental life. It is the thought of this huge wasted potential for cooperation and synergy that has led the two leaders to take stock of the deteriorating situation in India and Pakistan and attempt to save something from it before it is too late. Moreover, if this new chapter is at last being written into history, it is not because of any "special relationship" with a third party, but rather because the "battered wife" has finally left the violent husband, regained her self-respect, realised the obligation she has to her children, and moved on to try and make something of her life.

One of the most contentious issues between India and Pakistan is the question of Kashmir. Both countries are guilty of grave errors of judgement in this respect. However, Nawaz Sharif and Inder Kumar Gujral have recently begun to address this long-running dispute with something of the urgency and genuine will to change which it deserves.

One of the major controversies of the royal tour has centred on the British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook's offer to mediate in the Kashmir dispute. Such an offer might seem innocuous enough, but it succeeded only in provoking the wrath of the Queen's Indian hosts. To understand why, Britain's offer has to be seen in context.

As the Indian press has observed, what is most striking to Indians and Pakistanis is not that the offer has been made, but that it should be made now, just when it appears that the two countries are approaching a consensus on the issue of Kashmir. It was certainly not forthcoming when the disagreement was accompanied by overt hostility over the past fifty years. Suddenly, as soon as the will to peace seems to exist and the issue of Kashmir is high on the agendas of both premiers, Britain sails in and offers to "mediate". A settlement may still be far from a reality at this stage, but intent is two-thirds of conflict resolution. Britain's offer merely draws attention to the years of insensitivity and indifference that preceded it. It is too little, too late.

Moreover, it is patronising for the implication that after 50 years of experience in matters of diplomacy and international relations, India and Pakistan are still not able to resolve their differences without the help of big brother Britain. The lingering assumption of a semi-conscious superiority has been the subject of much criticism throughout the Queen's tour.

Having returned to London, Robin Cook, in an interview on BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme, attempted to defuse the mounting sense of crisis and clarify his position. He stated that "the offer was made in a private discussion with an Indian government official". Yet his back-pedalling did not carry much conviction.

Why should it, when it is transparently obvious that Britain's interest in the sub-continent derives in large part from the huge trade potential it has identified there? Many commentators have claimed that Britain's interest in mediating in Kashmir lies in the benefits it could derive from assuming — once again — a key strategic role in a peaceful and prosperous region. Robin Cook made no secret of this when he defended his mission in India by stating that he had "witnessed the signing of eight contracts secured by British firms at the Indo-British Trade Fair in Delhi".

Another incident that has angered Indians took place during the Queen's visit to Amritsar. Her husband, the Duke of Edinburgh, objected to the commemorative plaque erected in memory of the martyrs who were brutally shot in 1919 at Jallianwalla Bagh, when General Dyer ordered his troops to fire on demonstrators who were protesting against British rule. The plaque recorded the fact that 2,000 people lost their lives on that day. The Duke turned to an Indian dignitary next to him and told him bluntly: "That is simply not true. I served in the Navy with Dyer's son".

It is precisely this attitude that has angered India — that gossip on a gunboat counts for more than the collective memory of the largest democracy in the world. Martin Woolacott argues in the London *Guardian* that "Britain has not thought much about the Sub-continent in recent years. Europe and the United States have been Britain's consuming interest." As a result, 50 years on, this nation of shopkeepers who once ruled the world remains mired in an outdated assumption of its own effortless, blinkered superiority.

In that time, much has changed in India and Pakistan. Now both realise that the rest of the world wants "a piece of their action". Neither is prepared any longer to receive its former colonial masters in the manner to which they were once accustomed. The problems of the sub-continent are at long last being solved by its own people. If Britain is to trade with these states or engage in active diplomatic relations with them, they must do so as equals. Moreover, if Britain feels it can criticise the way another country is run, then it should be happy to receive criticism in its turn. If it cannot, then perhaps it truly is the "third-rate and mediocre power" the Indian prime minister said it was last week, in a moment of anger.

It is surely a sign of the times when a former colony can reveal its true thoughts about a Western nation and get away with it. The forced marriage is well and truly over, and the wife has gone her own way.

Fighting for the land, again

Structural adjustment has brought Zimbabwe, Africa's model welfare state, almost to its knees. As unrest crystallises into activism the government seems about to break the habit of a lifetime and do something. **Faiza Rady** asks if time has not already run out

This summer Zimbabwean workers staged a virtually uninterrupted series of strikes that hit major universities, security companies, hotels, restaurants, construction firms, banks, cement, lime and mining industries, railway and clothing workers and state employees. While the Mugabe administration seemed largely indifferent to growing social unrest in the industrial and service sectors, striking agrarian workers — totalling some 350,000 and constituting the largest workforce in the country — brought the commercial farming sector to its knees and, for once, obtained a swift response from the government.

In an attempt to appease the workers' rage, President Robert Mugabe toured the countryside pledging that he would confiscate five million hectares from white-owned agribusinesses and distribute the land to destitute black farm workers. "We are going to take the land and we are not going to pay for the soil," President Mugabe told black farmers and officials of his Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) Party. "That is our set policy. Our land was never bought [by the colonialists] and there is no way we could buy back the land. However, if Britain wants compensation, they should give us the money and we will pass it on to their children," he added.

For many destitute farm workers, the president's land confiscation scheme comes too late in the day.

"Despite the ZANU-PF party's progressive platform and rhetoric on land reform issues, after 17 years of independence, land is still largely in the hands of those who settled here during the colonial period. Land reforms have only transferred a bit of land from previous owners to a small black elite. The people fought for land, and yet they have none," Yash Tendon, an economist with the Harare-based International South Group Network, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

During earlier land reforms, the government went no further than to distribute small plots of land to some 60,000 peasants, while its more ambitious original land reform plans that would have changed the lives of more than one million people were shelved. Meanwhile, white farmers constituting only one per cent of the population still own 60 per cent of the most fertile land. "The concentration of landholdings in the hands of a few rich white farmers has locked the country into a development model which excludes the rural masses," commented economist Victoria Brittain in the Paris monthly, *Le Monde Diplomatique*.

Expressing their fury last week over long-delayed promises of reforms that never materialised in any significant way, more than 15,000 strikers brought production to a halt in the lush Trelawney farming district 50 miles northwest of Harare. On Thursday, angry workers trashed cars and trucks, tore up crops and destroyed produce. The strike turned violent after pay negotiations between the General Agricultural and Plantation Workers Union (GAPWU) and the white farmers reached a deadlock when the farmers refused to increase wages from the current monthly $29 to $67. "We have been downtrodden too long," shouted a worker blocking a road in the Headlands area east of the capital, Harare. "Zimbabwe is independent. We want better pay so our families can live better."

Although white farmers reject the pay increments as too costly, threatening to mechanise and lay off the strikers, the workers' modest demands still fall short of the $228 which, according to Consumer Council of Zimbabwe estimates, would cover the basic survival needs of a family of four. Since the early 1990s, poverty has become endemic in Zimbabwe, and now affects 62 per cent of the population.

Many analysts specifically blame economic reforms and structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) imposed on the country by the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for the increasing poverty. Even the WB admitted that two thirds of the population would not benefit from economic deregulation. "Since SAPs were implemented in 1990, the importance of access to land in promoting 'development' has not been part of the standard development model here," Professor Sam Moyo told me when I visited Zimbabwe this summer. Yet, while the land question stagnates, the international funding agencies' requirement of fiscal restraint has forced the government to slash essential health and welfare benefits and cut back on state employment.

In the same *Le Monde Diplomatique* article, Brittain notes that although post-independence Zimbabwe was often described as a model Southern African welfare state in the 1980s — with life expectancy jumping from 55 years in 1979 to 64 years towards the end of the following decade, the level of literacy reaching 94 per cent and infant vaccination increasing from 25 per cent to 80 per cent — such gains were lost to the cause of structural adjustment.

According to the Standard Chartered Bank of Zimbabwe, real earnings peaked in 1982, but have since declined by more than 40 per cent and are now below 1965 levels. Today's poverty is visible in downtown Harare where hungry urchins eek out a precarious living and gangs of unemployed youths roam the streets, hustling to survive. In the rural areas, the richness of the land masks the harsh living conditions of the rural poor, who are herded together on the white-owned commercial farms in tin-roofed shacks hidden among the lush Zimbabwean fields.

WB assurances that the private sector would absorb retrenchment in public sector employment — which, according to Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) estimates, has cost 50,000 workers their jobs — were not borne out in reality. Moreover, the WB's much-touted prescription of liberalising the economy to promote competition and improve productivity has had precisely the opposite effect. Unable to compete with the production capacity of stronger economies, the national manufacturing sector has literally caved in. The textile industry, for example, was destroyed since it could not compete against cheaper South African textiles flooding the market. As a result of public sector job losses and economic reforms, 40 per cent of the population is unemployed and 70 per cent of the 1.2 million workers in the formal sector earn less than $72 a month.

Since 1991, the health budget has been slashed by 32 per cent, per capita education expenditure by 32 per cent for primary schools and 34 per cent for the secondary level, the agrarian development budget has been trimmed by 26 per cent and social security is down 32 per cent.

The consequences are devastating. The minister of public and social services estimates that 19 per cent of rural children and 11 per cent of urban youths have dropped out of school because of increasing costs. Health expenditure slashes, combined with the WB's directives to make patients pay for their treatment regardless of their level of poverty, have had fatal results. By last year, life expectancy had dropped to 41.85 years, one of the lowest figures worldwide, and the 1996 infant mortality rate was estimated at 72.8 deaths per 1000 live births. Between 1988 and 1994, child undernourishment has increased by one third — affecting 17 per cent of all children, while three per cent are malnourished.

Analysts also blame health budget cuts and poverty for the AIDS epidemic — one of the worst in Africa. "Around 500 people die of AIDS in Zimbabwe every week and the spread of the disease is largely unchecked," reported the Zimbabwean *Mail & Guardian*. HIV infection is estimated to affect 50 per cent of the urban population and 70 per cent of hospital bed occupancy is AIDS-related. "There is no family in Zimbabwe untouched by AIDS deaths, no day without word of who has disappeared and is probably dead," wrote the *Mail & Guardian*.

Expressing the people's collective anger at their leadership's failure to realise their aspirations 17 years after Zimbabwe's independence, one woman ex-combatant said: "As far as we are concerned, the war has not been won. Now is the time to take up arms again."



LAST week, a former Congolese military ruler, Denis Sassou Nguesso, forced his way, with a little Angolan help, to the West African country's chief port Pointe Noire and seized the capital Brazzaville.

Congo's ousted elected civilian president, Pascal Lissouba fled first to Burkina Faso and later ended up in Togo.

Lissouba left the country after conceding defeat following more than four months of civil war in which he battled his predecessor Nguesso.

Nguesso's Democratic and Patriotic Forces (FDP) now control the entire country traditionally split between northerners and southerners. Officials in Kinshasa, across the river from Brazzaville , said that Nguesso would be visiting Kinshasa in the next few days.

Observers feard that the crisis in Congo Brazzaville will spill over into the neighbouring Congo Kinshasa.

Laurent Désiré Kabila, who ousted former Zairean dictator Mobutu Sese Seko in May and renamed the country the Democratic Republic of Congo, tried to mediate between Lissouba and Nguesso.

(photo: AFP)

On apartheid's bloody trail

Apartheid generals regret nothing, and anti-apartheid militants cynically call the Truth Commission a "circus", reports **Mohamed Sabrin** in Johannesburg

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) investigating apartheid-era crimes entered its most decisive phase last week as die-hard apartheid military leaders stood trial. They testified before the TRC as part of a special investigation into the armies of both, the former apartheid government and the anti-apartheid liberation movements.

Anti-apartheid activists were outraged when General Constand Viljoen said the South African Defence Force (SADF) had been an effective military force carrying out its patriotic duty. Viljoen denied that the SADF was a political tool of the then ruling National Party, dominated by white Afrikaaners. Viljoen pointed an accusing finger at the predominantly black African anti-apartheid movements for taking the war into the rural areas and using innocent villagers as human shields.

Viljoen claimed that the atrocities committed by both sides had to be seen in the context of the Cold War era. He said that the SADF was protecting South Africa from Communist expansionism since the former Soviet Union was supporting many of the liberation movements in Southern Africa.

Major General AJM "Joep" Joubert, former head of apartheid South Africa's military's special forces — the intelligence branch — told the TRC that he had been asked to draw up a plan to liquidate anti-apartheid activists and their supporters by the then chief of the SADF General Jannie Geldenhuys.

Joubert has applied for amnesty from the commission, which is empowered to grant such requests provided applicants make full disclosures of their past crimes.

General Georg Meiring, SADF head from 1993 to 1994 also testified, saying that soldiers of the apartheid army felt that the TRC was biased against them. The TRC has also received criticism from the predominantly ethnic Zulu Inkatha Freedom Party, which last Tuesday asked the public prosecutor to investigate the TRC for alleged bias.

On the other hand, leaders of the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA), the former armed wing of the Pan-African Congress of Azania severely criticised the TRC as a "circus". Brigadier Dan Mofokeng, a former top APLA commander who is today a member of the post-apartheid South African National Defence Force, does not regret his ordering attacks against white civilian targets, and he is adamant that he will offer no apologies. He says that he does not consider white civilians innocent. "They were part and parcel of the establishment," Mofokeng said. Brigadier Mbulelo Fihla, former head of APLA's intelligence apparatus, does not regret the fact that he targeted white civilians either.

The TRC must speed up its work if it is to complete its mandate by the July 1998 deadline, a spokesman announced last Wednesday. Over 7,000 people are seeking amnesty from the panel established by President Nelson Mandela's administration and chaired by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The TRC is empowered to grant amnesty to those who fully admit human rights violations committed between 1960 and 1994 and can prove political motives. "The purpose of finding out the truth is not in order for people to be prosecuted, it is so that we can use the truth as part of the process of healing our nation," explained Archbishop Tutu.

About 14,000 people have made statements so far to the 17-member panel, which spent its first year hearing testimonies from the victims before dealing with the criminals either as witnesses or as candidates for amnesty. Among other atrocities, the TRC investigated the prison death of celebrated political activist Steve Biko who died in September 1977 and the April 1993 killing of the prominent and charismatic communist cadre, Chris Hani. Evidence before the commission so far has revealed how the apartheid government's security forces routinely tortured and killed anti-apartheid activists. However, many top apartheid officials have avoided testifying, and the chain of command has therefore not been fully revealed.

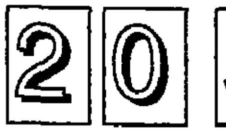
Last Tuesday, however, the TRC subpoenaed former President PW Botha, along with other top political and military leaders of the apartheid regime. Former anti-apartheid guerrillas, now top ANC officials, have also applied for collective amnesty according to the party's decision to take "collective responsibility for acts and conduct committed in the course of the just war against the system of apartheid within the framework of ANC policy."

The ex-wife of President Mandela, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, a prominent anti-apartheid activist and president of the ANC's Women's League, was also subpoenaed to appear before the commission because of her alleged implication in the killing of 14-year-old Stompie Seipei at her home in October 1988. Madikizela-Mandela remains a highly acclaimed and popular politician — especially amongst women's movements.

Edited by Gamal Nkrumah

M. KHODEIR P.O.BOX 1057, CAIRO 11511, TEL:418-0034/418-0035 FAX:418 28 63

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life




Printing advertisements, right from *Al-Ahram's* beginnings in 1875, meant financial independence and brought the paper further exposure throughout Egypt. But as **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** discovers, the myriad of ads placed also provide an accurate picture of a society in transition, where the colonial winds of change were bringing with them a growing desire for a European lifestyle and its attendant material commodities, tastes and fashions



Illustration by: Makram Henein

The large space accorded to advertisements in *Al-Ahram* may cause resentment among some readers, but it has its purpose — and also has a lengthy history.

Advertising, since the inception of the newspaper, is what provided it with its financial backing, enabling it to enjoy a considerable degree of autonomy with respect to the government and political parties. Indeed, it was the case that advertisers ran after *Al-Ahram*, rather than the reverse, which meant that the paper was never forced to surrender any of its independence to them, and undoubtedly accounts for the newspaper's longevity. It certainly spared it the pitiful fate of so many other newspapers that were not self-financed through advertisements and that suffered a long and painful death, beginning with having to reduce staffing levels and cutting the salaries of their employees, reducing the quality of the publication, and, eventually, as a sign of its final death throes, having to stop regular publication.

From the outset, it was clear that *Al-Ahram*'s founders, Salim and Bichara Taqla, not only had a keen journalistic sense, but also considerable business acumen. No sooner had they established the newspaper than they obtained official approval to publish the announcements of all the national and mixed courts, providing them with a steady, if modest, independent source of income. Shortly afterwards they began publication of an *Al-Ahram* daily supplement, called *Al-Sada* (The Echo), which featured a relatively large advertising section for a small newspaper. Its stock-market announcements, another steady source of income, was particularly popular among the wealthier agrarian classes and carried *Al-Ahram*'s name from the city to the countryside and, as another newspaper scion observed in 1907, *Al-Ahram* soon became a generic term for all Arabic language newspapers in Egypt.

As the newspaper grew, advertisements began to occupy increasing space. By the time it entered its fourth decade, between 40 and 50 per cent of the paper was devoted to advertisements, not inconsiderable for what was still at that time only a four-page publication. *Al-Ahram* was unique in its advertising policy. Unlike other newspapers in which the price of advertising space could be determined by the bargaining shrewdness of the client, *Al-Ahram* had fixed prices: 22 piastres per line on the front page, 14 piastres per line on the second and 10 piastres per line on page three. Advertisements in the supplement cost only 8 piastres per line. Also, the newspaper announced, "easier terms for advertisements that are to appear in several issues." One wonders whether they had a rule of thumb for this, as one frequently comes across advertisements appearing in several successive editions.

The importance of *Al-Ahram*'s classifieds also lies in the fact that they constitute what amounts to a sociological archive, providing detailed documentation on the social transitions in Egypt since the era of the Khedive Ismail, when the heady process of modernisation and the massive influx of Europeans during the late 19th century was generating substantial changes in tastes and consumer concerns.

Advertisements for tobacco, alcoholic beverages, clothing tailored according to European fashions, European style furniture, and appliances and medicines reflecting the advances in modern science at the time were addressed to an Egyptian readership, since foreigners generally had their own newspapers. As such, they reflect the growth of new social forces eager to acquire some of the amenities of a European lifestyle. In the city, modernisation was producing a rapid increase in the "effendi" or government bureaucrat class, educated elites in the liberal professions and small and middle level businessmen and entrepreneurs. In the countryside, we find a comparable growth in the middle and large landowning classes. Of course, the division between urban and rural society at the time is largely arbitrary, as most rural notables had homes in the city where they constituted an important segment of the new consumer forces that were coming into being. In this connection, advertisements are also indicative of the intensive urban expansion, particularly in Cairo and Alexandria, where new residential quarters that were spreading out on the outskirts of the older parts of the city reflected a departure from traditional modes of construction and new architectural demands to accommodate a developing urban infrastructure and the provision of new public services.

However, advertisements are not only a reflection of the changing tastes and morals of a society in transition; they also contribute to formulating them. Physical health is undoubtedly a preoccupation of us all, yet today's reader might be surprised to find that the advertisements addressing this concern occupied an extraordinarily large area of advertising space. At the same time, the products being promoted and the sales pitch are strikingly illustrative not only of the particular health concerns of Egyptians at the turn of the century but also of the divergence that was taking place in consumer trends. Products laying claim to the most extraordinary restorative and curative powers for an incredible panoply of ailments and afflictions were advertised, with no thought given to consumer protection.

"Scott's Emulsion" was promoted as "the most famous medication for revitalising and restoring strength to nursing mothers and curing milk deficiency. A composite of fish oil, lemon phosphate and soda, it is both delicious and easy to digest." Also on the market were "Parisian's Capsules to prevent humidity in the back and stimulate vitality, not to mention its amazing effect on the reproductive organs. It also cures anemia, poor circulation, hypertension, general fatigue, headaches and sciatica." Claiming similar virtues were "Egyptian Dragees," said to "restore the old to their youth by revitalising the nervous and muscular system" and "Nasouhi's Elixir, the best treatment for fortifying and purifying the blood and restoring it to its natural colour. It also improves health in general, fortifies the stomach and nervous system and relaxes the mind after intensive labour."

Evidently toothpaste and eye drops at that time were still only available at the local chemists. "Odole" was marketed in *Al-Ahram* as "the best means to preserve teeth, sterilise the mouth and guard against tooth decay. While all known tooth products today last only a short time, Odole penetrates to the core of the teeth to keep them clean and to remain effective hour after hour." For an eye ailment panacea there was "Wonder Drops — the best eye drops known to man for the treatment of all chronic eye ailments. Wonder Drops have an amazing counter effect against trachoma, conjunctivitis, inflammation of the eyelids and redness of the eyes. This product is registered with the Department of Health in the Mixed Courts and costs only 5 piastres per bottle."

Contrary to medical products, doctors and physicians seeking to promote their services plugged their expertise in their fields of specialty, and not infrequently their European credentials. As a sample out of hundreds, we have Cambus, ophthalmologist, graduate of the Higher Academy in Paris; Max Rudolph, gynecologist expert formerly engaged in the gynecology ward of Dresden Hospital and Dedicas, ophthalmologist with a degree from Paris and with experience in the hospitals of London and Vienna. Not that all physicians' areas of specialty appeared directly connected. Jean Papakostas advertised himself as "a specialist in pulmonary diseases, stomach ailments and hemorrhoids."

Pleasure stimulants must have always provided the medical profession with a steady stock in trade, but never as much as when the commercialisation of tobacco and alcoholic beverages moved into full swing. The influx of Europeans brought with it *an amazing* array of new and enticing products that found a growing market among segments of the local populace eager to emulate European habits as an indication of social advancement. Nothing could be more illustrative of this than the abundance of advertisements for alcoholic beverages, particularly those that were pitched to emphasise the snob appeal of certain brands. "The illustrious Calico Champagne is the most famous brand of champagne wine in the world. The winner of the most distinguished prizes in Europe, Calico has become the preferred beverage to be served at the most refined dinner parties and the most elegant wedding celebrations." Imparting a humorous twist to their ad, the promoters of Maureaux Cognac advise consumers to "beware when delighting in a glass of this cognac because of its superior quality, for having partaken of it once; you will never drink anything else."

It is interesting to note that most alcohol merchants were Greeks, who, judging by the names in the advertisements, also appeared to have the monopoly on the manufacture and distribution of cigarettes. To cite but one example, Charisto Demitropolo announces, "We have established an outlet for the sale of tobacco products in Manshiyya next to the Mohammed Ali Café and stocked it with the finest natural tobacco and the most distinguished brands of cigarettes. Our visitors will be delighted by the high quality of our products and our low prices."

Advertisements for clothes and furniture also demonstrated changing consumer values, as well as another new phenomenon of the age: the department store. Competition between the department stores was perhaps as intense as today, as is suggested by the numerous announcements for sales and discount prices. The following ad appeared in large font in *Al-Ahram* throughout June 1909: "The Largest Sale Ever! In Salim and Samaan Sednawi and Co. Located on Moski Street in Cairo, Bab Sharqi Street in Alexandria and Al-Sikka Al-Gadida in Mansura."

The new aesthetics in home furnishings are perhaps best represented by the advertisements for the "Butros Sadeq Store located in Al-Manshiyya Al-Sughra" and which read: "Our store provides all furnishings necessary for the home in the latest styles, such as brass beds manufactured in the greatest factories of England, metal cabinets, gold-leaf mirrors of every brand, machine cut dining tables, and all makes of chinaware. We are prepared to deliver all orders with the greatest speed to all quarters of Egypt and Sudan..."

Egyptians must certainly have been taken by the new inventions coming from the West. Apparently Shawarbi Street in downtown Cairo, then as now, was a centre for marketing imports, shops in the area placing ads for photographic equipment, phonographs and phonographic supplies. Also new on the market in the opening decade of the 20th century were Arabic typewriters. One brand, Al-Hilal, was advertised as "the machine which shows the letters as you write. It is expertly designed and features all the diacritical marks and is used by virtually every government department."

Reflecting the intensive urban development of the era were the numerous ads for *building supplies*, one example being the Stores of Nicolas Diab in Cairo which feature prominently in *Al-Ahram*. They specialised in the manufacture and sale of "cement tiles, both plain and coloured, and produced by the latest machinery. Wholesale or retail, we have special arrangements to sell our tiles at extremely low prices."

As *one might* expect, keeping pace with the urbanisation and the growth of big business, insurance companies found a ready market. Numerous European insurance firms opened branches in Egypt and placed ads in *Al-Ahram* with particular ardor. Monsieur Strauss, Cairo agent for the Patrista General Insurance Company boasted "the best and safest means to safeguard your property and money. We have policies to suit every client and at cheaper rates than any other company as old and reputable as ours." It would not be long however before resident Jews and foreigners in Egypt would find the Egyptian National Insurance Company, the opening of which was announced in large font in *Al-Ahram* of 24 March 1906. With the exception of one Egyptian, Hasan Pasha Muhsen, the rest of the board of directors were either Greeks (Pinaki, Zarvodaki) or Jews (Qatari, Manashe, Rolo). Their advertisement announced that Egypt's first insurance company insured "against fire, the explosion of steam operated machinery, and the suspension of wages that may occur as the result to any damages to the premises." It also boasted that their policies were backed by "the enormous capital assets of the best insurance houses in Europe" and that "we are the only company to issue contracts in Arabic."

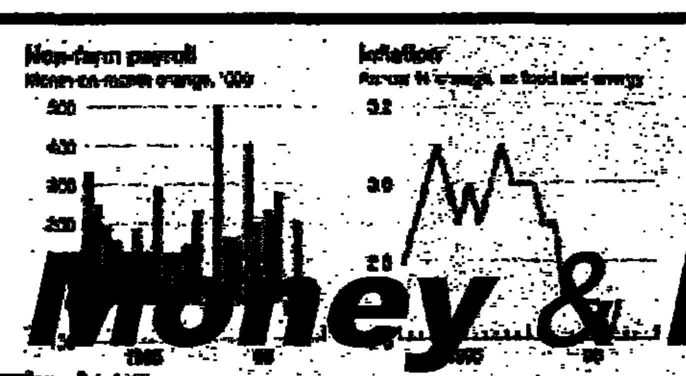
The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



Nile Bank's deposits surge

MOHAMED Rashad Ateut, Nile Bank's deputy chairman, stated that the volume of deposits increased this year to LE1 billion, in comparison with LE953,000 during the same period last year. He added that this increase is attributed to *the bank's expansion policy in new cities such as 6th of October* City, 10th of Ramadan City, El-Obour and Borg Al-Arab.

Ateut said that the Bank is studying the establishment of exports promotion, aimed at boosting exports to the Commonwealth States.



Sri Lankan fair

THE EXPORT Development Council of Sri Lanka will organise the largest international fair which will showcase a variety of products.

The fair, scheduled from 8-11 November 1997, will host 400 participants from all corners of the globe.

Sri Lanka has one of the fastest-growing economies in the world due to its economic liberalisation policies adopted some years ago.

SYSTEMS 97 presents "The World Online/New Media"

THE INTERNET is on many monitors, but its use is generally associated with fun and entertainment. At a "fair within a fair" known as "The World Online/ New Media", SYSTEMS 97 will show that this is only one side of the Online age. The sector will give interested trade visitors a chance to experience the latest Internet visions with a definite orientation toward business applications. Hall 14 will be a platform for information and communication via the Internet, intranet and extranet, focusing on new-media products and their potential commercial applications.

Mr. Christian Mayerhofer, exhibition coordinator, *Messe München* GmbH

The concept of integrating exhibits, an auditorium and an event stage into a single hall is the perfect combination for topic-related and product presentations and demonstrate individual application possibilities. First held in 1996, the online fair at SYSTEMS was a major attraction among exhibitors and visitors alike.

Important themes that will determine which exhibits are on display as well as which topics are covered in discussions, lectures and forum interviews include electronic commerce, digital markets, NC vs. Net PC and business TV. Visitors who are commercial users will have a chance to gather information on everything from electronic cash — which is also referred to as Cyber Money — during online shopping to the user-friendly and open standards on which the systems are based.

Al-Khodeir Co. and Cross Co. celebrate 20th anniversary



Al-Khodeir Egypt International for Industry and Trade SAE and Cross Pen Co. of America are celebrating their 20th anniversary. Attending the reception was Mr Ron Boss, chairman of the board; Mr Steven Hank, vice general manager; Chem. Ali Khodeir, chairman of the board and deputy member; Mr Mohamed Ali Khodeir, member of the board and marketing manager; Ms. Farida Tawfik, wife of Ali Khodeir and general manager of sales; and a group of Egyptian businessmen.

NBE's investment services

IN LINE with Egypt's reform policies which are geared towards supporting the private sector, creating a friendly investment environment and removing obstacles that may face businessmen, the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) has *introduced new and non-traditional* banking services with a view to activating and raising the efficiency of the market. In that vein, NBE's Investment Division has extended a bulk of services that would boost the business sector, propel investments and stimulate the capital market as follows:

Feasibility studies *and project evaluation*

The division prepares feasibility studies of both new projects and expansions of existing enterprises. The fees are low compared to the prevailing market rates, as this is regarded as a special service for the Bank's customers. Besides, the division supports new investments, prepares the necessary feasibility studies thereof and promotes these investments domestically and abroad. This is in addition to evaluating feasibility studies presented by the customers and prepared via external consultation offices for the following purposes:

— Equity holding or injecting the capital of the companies.

— *Rendering an opinion on the ec*onomic feasibility of the project.

— Granting loans that are deemed necessary for financing such investments.

Moreover, the Investment Division invites customers as well as different financial institutions to participate in the capital of some projects. The division also prepares market studies on some important and vital projects to render a recommendation to the Bank or the investors, whether to have equity participation therein, participate in their expansions, or abstain from extending finance thereto. This is besides preparing special studies on *public and private sector ailing com*panies so as to find the best means of their restructure. Furthermore, some special studies on the companies in which the Bank has equity participation are also conducted, in case such companies wish to increase their capital and determine the value of their shares and premiums.

*In line with Egypt's privatisation pol*icy, the Investment Division provides economic and financial considerations for new investment projects and evaluates companies so as to determine the value of their shares by using state-of-the-art methods.

Securities operations

The division invites closed corporations to become joint stock companies with shares listed on the *stock exchange*. It also provides the finance deemed necessary for businessmen via sophisticated capital market instruments. Moreover, the division reforms financial structures renders consultations in relation to the customers' portfolios and forms and manages portfolios on behalf of the Bank's customers.

Other services extended by the said division include preparing the feasibility studies of companies and projects *related to the capital market*, underwriting and offering equity holdings for sale.

In fact, the Investment Division's distinguished services come in line with the Bank's strategy which is tilted towards enhancing the pivotal role to be played by the business sector in the next stage, in addition to pushing forward the role that banks and financial *institutions play in developing* the Egyptian economy.

National Bank of Egypt

A weekly update on the NBE Securities Market Index from 12-16 October 1997

The NBE Index has decreased 7.02 points to register 398.57 points for the week ending 16/10/1997 against 495.59 points for the previous week ending 9/10/1997.

4 largest increases and decreases:

Company	Change %	Company	Change %
Misr Indust. Hotelier (Hilton)	-9.1	Hoechst Orient	+15.2
El-Nasr for Canning Agricultural Products Co.	-7.2	Alexandria Pharmaceutical Co.	+3.4
K.Z. for Chemical Co.	-4.5	Amiriya Cement Co.	+2.5
Egyptian-American Bank	-2.8	Egyptian International Pharmaceutical Co.	+1.9

Air France's new manager: Air France is on the right track



MR LAURENT Giscard d'Estaing, the new manager for Air France in Egypt and Sudan said that the global results of the company were very satisfactory: Worldwide: +8.4 per cent for the period April-August 1997 compared to the same period in 1996.

The results for AF in Africa and the Middle East have marked a progression of +14 per cent for the same period. Egypt as well...

This progression is mainly due to the new HUB transfer system at Paris' Charles de Gaulle Terminal Two. The HUB allows Air France passengers to reach their final destination with the minimum connecting time required.

Air France does not only mean France: "Thanks to the HUB, we're selling the whole world now," Giscard d'Estaing added.

Israel at a loss

photo: AFP



Palestinians and Israelis stand at the edge of a precipice, writes **Edward Said**; who will push them forward?

Anyone acquainted with *Israel's history* since 1948 will be aware that its leaders have always arrogated to themselves the right to intervene unilaterally in the affairs of other countries. This has not only been true of Israel's neighbours, but also countries like the United States and Italy, friends and even allies of the Jewish state. The Pollard case of recent memory apparently did immeasurable harm to American security, so much so that even the repeated appeals by Israeli prime ministers (Rabin, Peres and Netanyahu most recently) to the US have been turned down. Mordechai Vanunu was kidnapped off the streets of Rome, brought to Israel, and has been serving a life sentence in prison ever since. The list of invasions — in addition to assassinations, bomb outrages, kidnappings and the like — against Arab countries is far longer; these rankle in the minds of most Arabs for whom Israel's actions testify not only to that country's *supreme bellicosity* and arrogance, but also to Arab impotence and defenselessness. Against that background, then, suicide attacks on Israeli civilians stand forth as the desperate acts of the weak, morally inexcusable but understandable humanly. Yet Israel's most recent attempt against an Arab citizen in the capital city of the most friendly and pacific of Arab countries is mystifyingly obtuse and downright stupid. For not only was the assassination plan extremely bizarre, but its *method of implementation* peculiar in the extreme. Why try to kill someone by pouring poison into his ears (a method last employed by Claudius against Hamlet's father), and why antagonise the government of Canada by supplying the terrorists with forged and stolen Canadian passports?

The overriding impression is one of clumsiness and contempt, as if Israel's leaders had decided to throw caution to the winds and indulge their most primitive fantasies, with no other end in mind except to assert their power and humiliate the Arabs. Netanyahu's excuse for the caper — that it was part of Israel's unrelenting war against terrorism — simply made matters worse, not only because it demonstrated every intention to go on in this fashion, but also because it suggested that the *goyim* had it coming to them. "After centuries of anti-semitism, it was now "our" turn to push people around. That was it, since there was no possible advantages to attempting so coarse a gambit on the streets of Amman: "We shall do what we please, and hang the consequences."

To speak about Netanyahu's bungles as a sign that Israel has lost its way is of course to suggest that it had a way once. Under the country's historic leaders — Ben Gurion, Golda Meir, Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres — there was always evident a will to dominate, and Israel did this not only by overwhelming military power, accumulated and nourished over years and years, but also by a qualitative attention to its own Jewish citizens and society. This meant that education received high priority and that many of the institutions of civil society such as the media, the courts, the universities, the labour movement, developed very much along Western European lines.

There were always hidden and unacknowledged rifts within the society, between Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews, for instance, and between Jewish and non-Jewish (i.e. Palestinian) citizens, but Israel could claim to the world that its people in the main fared better there than they had in the pre-1948 Diaspora (except for American Jews, who prospered in the US as nowhere else). Israel's externally postponed problem, however, was always its actual place and status in a part of the Middle East that was predominantly Arab and Islamic.

Ben Gurion, we now know, felt in the beginning that it was better for Israel to reject *Arab peace overtures after 1948* and well *into* the early '60s; he thought that the state of siege was materially beneficial to the country, on the one hand and, on the other, it allowed Israel to insulate itself against Levantinisation, Arabisation, and the like. So state policy could follow from the idea that Israel was a sort of *cultural* and *political fortress* developing its own interests and strengths against its Islamic and Arab surroundings. As a result, Israeli identity had specific content as something assertive and collective at the same time, something that could be shaped and formed over time as a separate Jewish identity freed from its burdensome past and its immediate context in the eastern Mediterranean.

I have never agreed with Israel's politics, but at least until the late 1970s I could grasp the logic that drove them. It is not difficult to put oneself in the place of a people whose centuries of persecution and weakness required restitution, they felt, by means of a new political identity that was the opposite of what Jews had been in the past. Yet so great was the power that Israel was able to accumulate since the 1967 War, and so remarkable were its successes for Diaspora Jews that it soon outstripped the Arabs economically, culturally and socially. What had been a beleaguered and uncertain national state became a nuclear power and, more significantly, an occupying power, ruling over several million Arabs which it persisted in treating as inferior and alien.

The stunning thing is that, as one reflects on the past two decades, Israel's policies emerge as fundamentally unwise, foolish in fact, as if all considerations of prudence and normal human caution had been dismissed by the country's leaders and its electorate as so much unnecessary nonsense. There is no question that Israelis want acceptance, and the normalisation between themselves and their neighbours on which all human beings depend for their security. But as the colonisation of the West Bank and Gaza increased, as the grandiose international adventures multiplied (for example, during the invasion of Lebanon, and the continuing occupation of the south), as political gains were squandered, it was as if the country lost its bearings and drifted without sense of proportion or of self-preservation. I used to imagine myself addressing Rabin or Begin with the question "where do you expect all this violence against Arabs, *all this willful humiliation*, all this reckless expenditure of your power, to lead? Do you think that in the end we will say, yes, you are wonderful and we accept you? Do you expect all of us to forget the past, forget the land you took, the people you killed, the houses you destroyed, the tortures, the bombings, the wholesale cruelty, and then begin to feel that you are really wonderful people after all, and that we want you here, living on our land, of which you take more every day, robbing us of our water, of our freedom of movement, of our hope and very sense of identity, and finally accepting you as good neighbours?"

The import of such a question is totally missing in Israeli politics today, with the exception of a small group of individuals whose consciences and sense of reality are activated by the havoc all around them. It was extremely significant that, for the first time ever, as a result of a Palestinian terror-suicide raid, an Israeli voice was raised in accusation not of the perpetrators but of the Israeli government. General Matti Peled's daughter, whose own daughter was killed in the market bomb attack, wasted no effort on railing against Palestinians, but vented her wrath on the willful policies of her government which, she said, actually create terrorism.

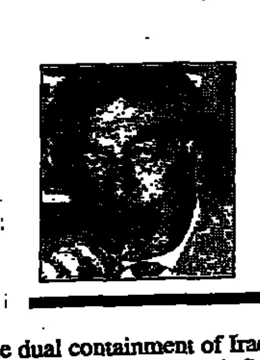
I knew her late father very well, and recall that in 1983 in Geneva, at a UN conference on the question of Palestine I asked him what caused him to accept the difficult fate of a lone Israeli voice speaking out against his former military colleagues and his own government for their inhumanity to the Palestinians. "Remorse," he said simply and definitively: he had felt the pangs of conscience at what Israeli Jews had done, and were continuing to do, to the Palestinians. That his legacy should be passed on so demonstrably to his daughter in her hour of terrible grief testifies to the power of a sentiment which, while largely absent in the society at large, is still there and can be fanned and encouraged. Except for the Peleds, Israel Shahak, Leah Tsemel, and a few others like them, Israel seems now to be flailing round destructively without much policy or intelligence. The country has lost is sense of purpose, and can only react instinctively against a "terrorism" it categorically refuses to *investigate as having anything to do with its* behaviour towards Palestinians particularly and Arabs in general. There is a failure of reason and an incapacity to understand that acceptance and normalisation cannot be imposed by obdurate military force.

There is a deeper problem. There seems to be a *battle inside Israel and the Diaspora today* between Orthodox authorities and the more liberal Reform and Conservative segments of the Jewish people. Many secular and liberal Jews bewail the emergence of Orthodoxy as the consequence only of local Israeli politics but they miss, I think, the inescapable outcome of establishing a state whose main purpose is to establish and enshrine Jewishness alone as its raison d'être. The crisis in Israel today is a crisis of what Jewish identity is, if it is not the extremist, inordinately backward and primitive brand of Orthodoxy that has come to the fore. These people say that they embody Judaism, or at least the Judaism that Israel was designed to perpetuate. Their opponents have very little to offer by way of serious response, since they cannot claim that, as a Jewish state Israel in the end can do more than make sure that non-Jews are simply kept down or kept away. Liberal Zionism as represented by the Labour Party of Rabin and Peres failed the test when it came to Oslo; in the end, they too wanted Jewishness to prevail at all costs, and never mind the changes required for a real peace with the Palestinians. Oslo failed not only because it was unjust to the Palestinians but also because *Israeli leaders were unable to take* a real step forward out of their historical policies of humiliating and bludgeoning the Arabs into submission.

Rabin and Peres (as well as their American patrons) were simply blind to the real meaning and the real possibilities of peace. They *should* have seen that what was being offered was the possibility of a new way, one that put Israelis and Arabs on an equal footing in charting the future, instead of conceiving of a common destiny. Rabin and Peres took the easy way of consolidating their territorial and military gains by other means (i.e. autonomy, so-called) and basically proceeded as they always did in the past, by force and with the contempt for the Arabs that characterised *much of their previous history*.

Palestinians and Israelis together stand at the edge of a precipice today. Neither people is blessed with a leadership of vision or moral courage. But the Israelis face a more severe and difficult challenge. They must define Jewish identity in such a way as to permit *them to live intelligently and productively* in the future by coexisting as equals in an Arab and Muslim Middle East. Unfortunately, there is little in the official Israeli past to draw on for such a task. And, alas, the Palestinian and Arab leadership is too powerless and morally bankrupt to offer anything significant for the Israelis to work with. It is left to a small number of intellectuals and visionaries to articulate a new theory of coexistence which, in the current impasse, might offer a way out of the quandary. I shall discuss this in my next article, but in the meantime, Netanyahu bungles on, rash, heedless, destructive and essentially unregenerate.

An iron grip



If the overthrow of Saddam Hussein is not a priority for the US, wonders **Eric Rouleau**, will the sanctions imposed on Iraq open the way to more catastrophes?



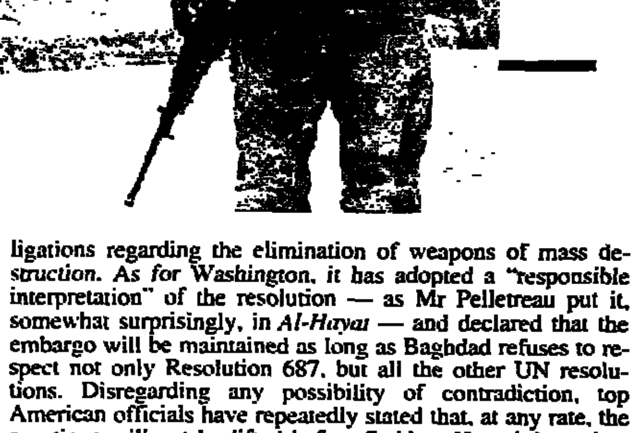


photo: AP

"The dual containment of Iraq and Iran is more a slogan than a strategy": so wrote three influential American personalities recently in the political journal *Foreign Affairs*, arguing in favour of the *normalisation of* US-Iran relations. Recent events seem to confirm the diagnosis pronounced by these former advisers to presidents Carter and Bush, Zbigniew Brzezinski and Brent Scowcroft, and former assistant secretary of state Richard Murphy.

Although it is unlikely that the US will formally abandon a policy backed by Congress's Republican majority and the Jewish lobby, recent *initiatives show* that the man in the White House has the means of introducing new twists to the sacrosanct policy of dual containment, at least as far as Iran is concerned. By interpreting the D'Amato Law as he sees fit, Bill Clinton has invalidated the content of *legislation* which threatens to slap sanctions on any non-American company investing more than $40 million a year in the Islamic Republic's energy industry. *Not only has he* refrained from "punishing" Total, the French firm which has committed itself to a two-billion dollar investment, he also recently gave the green light to the *construction* of two pipe-lines linking the oil and natural gas reserves of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to Iran, thus guaranteeing that the government in Tehran will enjoy billions of dollars in revenues in future.

This generosity should contribute to bringing *Tehran closer* to Washington, until conditions are ripe for "dialogue" and normalisation. But Bill Clinton's purpose is far more ambitious. Clearly, he wants *to help the* former Soviet republics of central Asia move out of Russia's sphere of influence; Russia, of course, would have preferred that their resources pass through its territory *rather* than that of Iran. Clinton also seeks to encourage the development of energy resources in these same Muslim republics, destined to complement Gulf reserves. He will *thus manage* to reduce the industrial nations' dependence on Arab oil, in anticipation of a marked increase in global energy consumption.

The US's oil strategy, which seems to dictate a reduction in the pressure on Iran, justifies, on the other *hand, a prolonged* embargo on Iraq, independently of other political or security considerations.

The sanctions inflicted upon *Baghdad*, in fact, not only serve the interests of other petrol producers in the region, notably Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, friendly countries whose petrodollars fuel US industry, *but* also allow the stabilisation of oil prices at "reasonable" levels, compatible with both the interests of consumers and those of the US petrol giants intent on cashing in on *massive* investments throughout the world, in the central Asian republics, Africa or Latin America.

Can we conclude that the advantages inherent in the Iraqi status *quo are inducing* the US to abstain from working toward the overthrow of the regime in Baghdad? The US, clearly, would like to get rid of Saddam Hussein — but not at any price. The and Shi'ites could exercise greater influence than the ruling Sunni minority. Nor would they wish for the establishment of a regime "unfriendly" to the US. The warning directed at Europe by Robert Pelletreau in an article published in *Al-Hayat* on 13 October last year is significant in this respect. The former US assistant secretary of state made it a point to warn French, Italian and Russian oil companies, in particular, that the contracts they could be foolish enough to conclude with Baghdad today may just as easily be abrogated by Saddam Hussein's successor. He immediately made it clear, however, that the coming regime would have to make sure not to "exclude" US companies from future petroleum industry development projects.

In the same article, Pelletreau skillfully described how the Iraqi "nightmare" *would disappear along with Saddam Hussein*; he dwelt on the efforts Washington would make to lift the sanctions, including those related to war reparations, do away with Iraq's debts, and resuscitate the economy. He omitted to remind his readers of several official statements, however, including recent ones by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, in which it is clear that the reversal of the sanctions would be neither automatic nor unconditional. *This means that* Washington is reserving the right to maintain sanctions, should the coming regime appear unworthy of its trust. The message was *clearly addressed* as much to Saddam Hussein's potential successors as to Europe, particularly France and Russia, in case these countries were still under the impression that they could maintain their traditionally privileged status in the Iraqi economy.

This rivalry between Paris and Washington stands out against the shadow of political differences opposing the two capitals. French diplomacy, it is true, has always been guided by two principles: the first, formulated by General de Gaulle, establishes France's refusal to recognise governments, which by *definition are transitory, as opposed to states, which are* permanent in essence. In other words, international relations are basically founded on national interests, not on ideological or moral considerations, which may only be taken into account exceptionally. The Iraqi regime, clearly, is despicable; but it is not that different from many other governments throughout the world, with which France, and surely the US, have normal, frequently cordial, and most often fruitful dealings.

The second principle traditionally observed by French diplomacy *relates to embargoes, which have been* proven inefficient in most cases, and even sometimes counterproductive. Paris has always considered that, for the sake of efficiency, sanctions should be applied very selectively, and for strictly limited periods. At any rate, the door to dialogue must be left open, otherwise sanctions would lead only to failure. In brief, Paris prefers classical diplomacy, the simultaneous use of carrot and stick, in reaching its goals and criticised France for its attitude toward Iraq, but has not eschewed *its privileged relations with China — accused of systematic*, large-scale human rights violations, the oppression of the people of Tibet, and its contribution to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Washington has also conducted a long and patient dialogue with North Korea, in a bid to convince this dictatorship to relinquish the nuclear weapon it had produced secretly. Exchanges have also taken place with the *Taliban, which the US will no doubt recognise officially the* day this Islamist movement gains control over all Afghanistan's territory. Washington, in other words, does not waste time over ideological and moral considerations when its own interests are at stake.

American pragmatism, nevertheless, does have its limits. Everyone I met recently in Washington, whether administration *officials or academics, admits that sanctions have not been* successful in weakening Saddam Hussein. An expert on Iraq, a counsellor to the Defence Department, went so far as to argue, during a recent closed meeting, that the Iraqi president is likely to remain in power during the coming decade, if not longer. When one remarks that, in the meantime, the international community is starving the Iraqi people, reducing the Iraqi middle classes to destitution, provoking the premature death of tens of thousands of children for lack of food and adequate medical attention, ruining the economy for many years to come, *condemning an entire generation to under-development*, and threatening Iraq with disintegration, which will lead to the destabilisation of several countries in the region, one is usually *met by an awkward* silence.

The responses that one does obtain at times are disappointing. Some argue that Saddam Hussein is solely responsible for the present fate of the Iraqi people, as if this statement exonerated the United Nations of all accountability in the current situation. Others claim that only sanctions will achieve the destruction of Iraq's military capabilities, described as though the army was still what it was made out to be before the Gulf War: "the fourth most powerful army in the world"! No one, however, mentions that the embargo on arms *purchases will remain* in force even after the oil embargo ends, that the 406 electronic surveillance stations set up by the UN throughout the country will be maintained, and that the US fleet and tens of thousands of troops will remain in the Gulf region.

In any case, the polemic which pits France against the US so far only involves the oil embargo imposed by Security Council Resolution 687. *Paris (but also Moscow, Peking, and Lon-* ligations regarding the elimination of weapons of mass de*struction. As for* Washington, *it has* adopted a "responsible interpretation" of the resolution — as Mr Pelletreau put it, somewhat surprisingly, in *Al-Hayat* — and declared that the embargo will be maintained as long as Baghdad refuses to respect not only Resolution 687, but all the other UN resolutions. Disregarding any possibility of contradiction, top American officials have repeatedly stated that, at any rate, the *sanctions will not be lifted before Saddam Hussein's regime* is overthrown.

The four other members of the Security Council, for their part, have adopted what Mr Pelletreau has described splendidly as the "narrow interpretation" of Resolution 687. They emphasise that nothing in this text, or in the 40-odd other resolutions, allows Washington its very particular interpretation, *however "responsible" it claims to be. It is also* to be noted that any attempt to overthrow the government of any third country constitutes a flagrant violation of the UN Charter. Furthermore, the US government cannot demand that Iraq respect all UN resolutions, on one hand, and prevent the implementation of these same resolutions, on the other.

Washington, for instance, forbids the opposition, notably the Kurdish movements, from engaging in negotiations with Baghdad over the recognition of their democratic rights, although this procedure does in fact conform to Resolution 688. *At the same time, the US administration* turns a deaf ear when Tarek Aziz tells the press that Iraq no longer considers itself in a state of war against Israel, a stance which, according to Washington, corresponds to one of the UN *resolution's* stipulations.

In the final analysis, one could argue that the US government — involuntarily, of course — is serving Saddam Hussein's interests. It is not demanding that he respect the democratic rights of his people, or human rights. Washington has also deprived Saddam Hussein of every reason he could have *had to facilitate the task of the UN disarmament* commission (UNESCOM), since it declared from the outset that the oil embargo would not be lifted, even if all weapons of mass de*struction are eliminated*. Likewise, *it reduces* the opposition's capacity to harness popular support by warning it that, even if it did succeed in overthrowing the regime, the lifting of the embargo is not a foregone conclusion.

One sometimes wonders what Washington's target really is: Saddam Hussein, or Iraq? Must one believe that "dual containment" is neither a slogan, nor a strategy — merely a dangerous, short-sighted policy?

Al-Ahram Weekly

Netanyahu's 'different drummer'

During the inauguration of the Shimon Peres Peace Centre in Tel Aviv this week, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu was conspicuously absent, explaining later that he had "prior commitments".

If nothing else, Netanyahu is, at least, consistent. His contributions to the peace process have also been conspicuously absent — mainly because he also had prior commitments. In this case, the commitments were to Israel's extreme right wing, without whose support, his coalition government would have collapsed months ago.

Foreign Minister Moussa did not mince his words as he joined Peres and Israeli President Ezer Weizman in inaugurating the centre. "To erode the territorial viability of the West Bank and Gaza... or of the Golan Heights for that matter, through the confiscation of land and the building of settlements, is to erode the possibility of reaching a just and workable settlement, in fact it is to erode the possibility of reaching any settlement at all.

"To procrastinate in the implementation of the agreements reached, is to render them meaningless...

"To try to humiliate the Palestinian partner and to deprive the Palestinian people of even the hope in a different future ... is to close all avenues for conciliation and peaceful relations... let us not forget that despair and frustration are the midwife to violence."

Made in the heart of Israel, Moussa's message to Israelis was a passionate appeal for reason. "We need a time out," he urged, "A time out of this despair and frustration; a time out of acrimony and recrimination; a time out of negative policies and violations. We need no more settlement activities, no more terrorist attacks, no more collective punishment, no more meaningless redeployments, no more unfulfilled promises."

Israelis attending the inauguration met Moussa's appeal with resounding applause. Will Netanyahu listen? With his latest contribution to Middle East "peace" taking the form of "masterminding" Israel's bungled terrorist operation in Amman, it is, unfortunately, highly doubtful that reason is a tune that appeals to the Israeli premier's ears.

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Al-Ahram Offices

Main office

AL-AHRAM, Al-Galaa St. Cairo.
Telephones: 5786100/5786200/5786300/5786400/5786500. Direct: 5786064
Telex: 20185/93346 Fax:5786089 /5786833
E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg

Overseas offices

USA
Washington DC: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, Suite 1258, 529 National Press Bldg, Washington DC 20045; Tel: (202)-737-2121/2122.
New York: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, 39th Fl., Chrysler Bldg., 405 Lexington Ave. New York, NY 10174-0300; Tel: (212)972 6440; Telex: 497 9426 ITT U.I.; Fax: (212) 286 0285.
Los Angeles: Soraya Aboul Seoud, 600 S. Curson Ave., 402 LA, CA 90036, USA; Tel: (213)-857-0941; Fax: (213)-857-7084.

Russia
Moscow: Abdel-Malek Khalil, Ahram Office, Kutuzovski Pro Dom 7/4 Kv. 50, Moscow; Tel: 243 4014/ 243 1424; Fax: 230 2879

Canada
Montreal: Mustafa Samy Sadek, Al-Ahram Office, 800 Rene-Levesque Blvd, West Suite 2440, Montreal H3B IX9, Quebec; Tel: (514)876 7825 Fax: (514) 876 9262/ (514)876 7825.

United Kingdom
London: Amr Abdel-Samie. Al-Ahram Office, 203 - 209 North Gower street London NW1 2NJ
Tel: 0171 388 1155, Fax: 0171 388 3130

France
Paris: Sherif El-Shoubashy, Bureau Al-Ahram 26, Rue Marbeuf, 75008 Paris; Tel: (1) 537 72700; Al-Ahram F.; Fax: (1) 428-93963.

Germany
Frankfurt: Mohamed Eissa El-Sharkawi, Al-Ahram Bureau Friedrichstr. 15, 60323 Frankfurt, Tel: (069) 9714380/ (069) 9714381 Fax: (069) 729571.

Austria
Vienna: Mustafa Abdalla, 2331 Vosendorf Orts Str. 253; Tel: 692965/ 694805; Telex: 13 2726 GIGI A; Telefax: 694805.

Greece
Athens: Abdel-Azim Darwish, 69 Solonos St., Third floor, Kolonaki 106-79, Athens, Greece. Tel. and Fax :3634503.

Japan
Tokyo: Mohamed El-Dessouki, Duke Aoyama 4-11, Higashi 4 - Chome Shibuya - Ku, Room 402. Tokyo; Tel: (03) 340 63944; Fax: (03) 340 6625

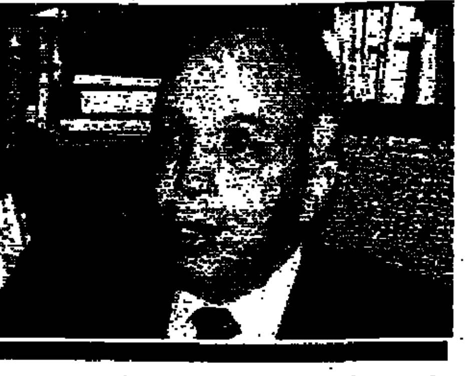
Italy
Mustafa Abdallah [S.A.B. 2000] 00191 ROMA-V. Guido Bant, 34. Tel: 3332250 Fax: 3332294

Brazil
Rio de Janeiro: Ahmed Shedid, Cx. Postal 2395, CEP. 20001.

South Africa
Johannesburg: Mohamed Sabreen, Oxford Manor, 196 Oxford road-Northland 2116, Johannesburg, Tel.and Fax: (011)4477425.

A change of tune

Is Washington reappraising its unconditional support for Israel? **Ibrahim Nafie** detects the beginnings of a shift in American attitudes



For the longest time US policy in the Middle East has been mired in a particular mind set, even though events in the region clearly require a fresh approach. Now, at last, there are signs of change.

Indications of a shift in attitude have been rumbling below the surface for about four years now. Only in the past three months, however, has it been possible to consider an option once anathema to US policy makers — how best to exert pressure on the Israeli government before it destroys all hopes of peace.

Such a course can now be contemplated because of a shift in the attitudes of the American Jewish community. There now exists a substantial body of opinion urging the US administration to exert pressure on Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, in order to rescue the peace process and to safeguard US interests in the Middle East.

This emerging trend comes after a period of sharp divisions inside the American Jewish community. To many Jewish leaders and organisations the notion of pressuring Israel was sufficiently taboo that, even when the Arabs urged the US to act as an honest broker and ensure that Israel adhered to the fundamental principles of the peace process, their requests were met with one reply. "We will not pressure Israel."

The problem of applying pressure on Israel came to a head with Madeleine Albright's visit to the Middle East. The Palestinians and Israelis, she announced, would have to make some very difficult decisions if the peace process is to move forward again. And many American Jews began to realise that Albright's solution was not as simple as it appeared. They realised that if the US is to act as an impartial mediator in the peace process, domestic political considerations must not be allowed to hamper the administration's manoeuverability. And they were suddenly faced with the difficult question: Is it not up to us to reassure the administration that there will be no political repercussions from the American Jewish community should Washington decide to pressure Netanyahu into refraining from actions that threaten the very existence of the peace process?

The Democrats could use such assurances. Clinton had commanded 80 per cent of the Jewish vote in his two presidential campaigns. With Vice President Al Gore as the likely Democratic candidate for the year 2000, the Clinton administration is loath to take any actions that might alienate such support.

Many American Jews have begun to fear that history will hold them responsible for obstructing the measures necessary to secure a lasting peace. And increasingly they have come to realise that the only solution to the current deadlock between the Israelis and the Palestinians lies in two mutually contingent processes. The Palestinian Authority must act decisively to counter-act terrorism and the Israeli government must cease settlement building, implement the provisions of agreements already signed, and refrain from further provocations inimical to the spirit of peace.

Events over the past three months have exacerbated divisions inside the US Jewish community and gradually brought the shifting trends to the surface. On 10 September, Albright received a letter from American Jewish leaders asking her to urge Arafat to respond to Netanyahu's demands to fight terrorism. At the same time, they asked her to adhere to her promise to revive the peace process.

Albright's visit proceeded much as expected. Yet, while Arafat responded to the call to combat terrorism, Netanyahu refused to countenance any halt to settlement building, a condition which even American Jewish organisations view as essential.

In the face of Netanyahu's blatant challenge to US policy, American Jews found themselves forced to clarify their position. The majority of the Jewish community recognise the Oslo Accords as the most viable framework for realising Israel's demands for security. Prominent Jewish figures began to openly criticise Netanyahu's policies and accuse him of jeopardising not just peace but the future of Israel.

Further evidence of this shift in American Jewish attitudes appeared in a recent opinion poll. When asked whether the US administration should exert pressure on both Netanyahu and Arafat, 84 per cent of those polled said yes. When asked whether the US administration should pressure Netanyahu (leaving Arafat's name out) 62 per cent of those polled replied positively.

For the first time American Jews are appealing to the administration to exert pressure on Israel. This development dramatically alters the framework within which US policy is made. Some observers in Washington interpret it as a green light to President Clinton to take the necessary measures to compel Netanyahu to respect the fundamental principles of the peace process.

Others, however, continue to believe that electoral considerations limit Clinton's ability to temper Netanyahu's challenge to the international community's desire for peace. Yet whatever course the US administration takes, one thing is certain: the difficult decisions necessary to rescue the peace process can only be made in Washington.

An updated version of Non-Alignment

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed argues that Mandela's South Africa can become, with Egypt and India, the nucleus for an updated version of Non-Alignment

In less than ten days, Cairo has played host to India's Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral and South Africa's President Mandela. Before coming to Egypt, Gujral visited South Africa, thus ensuring that the leaders of the three countries held bilateral meetings within a short span of time. It is tempting to see in this pattern of events a trilateral project in the making, even if it is still incomplete because no meeting has brought the three leaders together in a common gathering yet, a project in which the Egypt/India/Yugoslavia triumvirate that once formed the nucleus of the Non-Aligned Movement is being replaced by an Egypt/India/South Africa axis on which an updated version of Non-Alignment can be built.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, it seemed that the world order had become unipolar and that the United States was the unchallenged leader of that new order. But today we are seeing friction between the capitals of the North and challenges to America's exclusive leadership. An obvious example is the deal struck by the French oil company Total with Iran in open defiance of Washington's decision to penalise multinationals which do business with Iran. Because France was supported by the European Union, the United States had to back down. In such a context, it is no surprise that prominent countries of the South should come forward with their own agenda too.

In the past, the Non-Aligned Movement was a gathering of countries which, from a Third World perspective, were reluctant to become satellites of either of the two superpowers making up the two poles of the bipolar world order. Within the movement, Egypt and India symbolised opposition to colonialism, while Yugoslavia symbolised resistance to Stalinism. Together, they sought to build a platform that would immunise them against the hegemony of either world bloc.

With the East/West confrontation replaced by a growing North/South divide, bipolarity is acquiring new connotations. Throughout the Cold War, the two world poles were mutually exclusive. In tactical terms, they spoke of the possibility of "peaceful co-existence", but decision-makers on both sides knew that in strategic terms the ultimate victory was to either capitalism or communism. Not so with the North-South divide, where neither side can, nor indeed aspires to, eliminate the other.

The regions of the world most closely associated with the destitution of the South are sub-Saharan Africa and the southern part of Asia. India is anchored in the latter; Egypt and South Africa bracket the former. With the communication and information revolutions transforming the world into a global village and abolishing distances between states, any attempt by one state to eliminate another is bound to boomerang against the instigator. In other words, a previously 'open' world system, which appeared to allow an unimpeded escalation of conflict-situations, is being replaced by a closed system, in which protagonists will be forced to display, however reluctantly, a minimum degree of solidarity to ensure the respective security, stability and welfare of each.

This comes up against ideologies of discrimination, best illustrated by the notion of apartheid. Apartheid is coming to acquire a new function following the collapse of such once insurmountable barriers as the Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall, and the emergence of a new globalist ideology. Apartheid is the ideological justification for the establishment of spiritual barriers to replace the previous material ones backed by the military power and absolute sovereign prerogatives of states. South Africa has succeeded in defeating apartheid locally; an updated version of Non-Alignment will have to challenge — and defeat — the neo-apartheid threat now manifesting itself along the North-South divide globally. Already India is challenging nuclear apartheid, the only state so far to openly oppose a global military order based on allowing certain great powers to remain nuclear while others are denied the privilege. Egypt and the Arab world have every interest in upholding India's viewpoint on nuclear apartheid, if only to counter the threat of Israel's still undeclared nuclear arsenal.

It thus appears that combatting apartheid, as demonstrated by both South Africa and India, is central to an updated version of Non-Alignment. Another field for the implementation of such a new version is that of the United Nations, which can no longer continue to reflect the world structure which prevailed in the immediate aftermath of World War II, nor, for that matter, throughout the Cold War. Germany and Japan, both defeated in World War II, are today among the most powerful states on earth, while the Soviet Union, one of the main victors in that war, has today disappeared following its defeat in the Cold War. And yet Germany and Japan are deprived of permanent membership and veto power in the Security Council, while Russia, the successor of the Soviet Union, has retained the latter's privileged status. Any restructuring of the United Nations to reflect post-Cold War realities should not be limited to righting the wrongs with regard to the North, but should extend to granting equal status to countries in the South. With their weight in the South, India, South Africa and Egypt are eligible for the assumption of wider responsibilities in a restructured UN. Rapprochement between the three states can help optimise opportunities in this field.

My first prize

By Naguib Mahfouz

I will always remember the first award I received: the Qut Al-Qulub Al-Demerdashiya Prize. It came at the beginning of my literary career and you cannot imagine how this prize encouraged me to follow the path I had chosen. It was the first sign of recognition by the critics of the time that I was on the right path.

The prize was LE40, to be shared between myself and Ali Ahmed Bakathir, I for my novel *Radobis*, he for his novel *Fellaha*, which was later made into a film starring Um Qalthoum. All Abbasiya enjoyed my LE20, which I spent on the young people in the area. Those LE20 were limitless. Whenever friends noticed me wearing a pair of new shoes, they would say "*Radobis*", and if I bought a cheese sandwich, they would also exclaim "*Radobis*"!

I never met the lady who offered the prize, as she left the choice to a committee including the most illustrious writers of the day, amongst them Dr Taha Hussein and Ahmed Amin. I received my prize from them, although I did go to Qut Al-Qulub's house to leave a word of thanks.

I was employed at the time by the Ministry of Religious Endowments, and was told that Ahmed Amin wanted to speak to me on the telephone. I answered, quaking, but he was very affable and asked me whether, since I had written a historical novel, I should have studied Ancient Egyptian history, the subject of my novel. I replied that I had indeed studied Egyptian history very thoroughly. He then asked me why, in that case, I had written about a Pharaoh being driven in a chart pulled by horses? Did I not know that horses were only introduced into Egypt during the reign of the Myksos, several centuries later? I explained that I was aware of that fact, but in my novel I wanted to endow the Pharaoh with the maximum of pomp and splendour. Ahmed Amin was able to explain this to the other members of the committee, who accepted that it was not a slip on my part but a modification, in the interest of the novel. So I won the prize.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

To attend or not to attend?

Al-Mussawar: "Is it not strange that the US, through various diplomatic channels, should tell us that it is worried about Netanyahu and his policies, while refraining from uttering publicly one word of criticism about him? While the US is always anxious to underline the friendly relationship between us, praising to the sky our efforts at economic reform, it nevertheless spares no effort to create problems between us. President Mubarak was right when he asked, before officers of the second and third armies, whether this was friendship, reminding the 'American friend' of certain actions like the whisking away of the North Korean ambassador. It seems that US friendship bears an uncanny resemblance to the fantastical content of the US films Egyptian young people make fun of."
(Abdel-Kader Shoheib, 17 October)

Akhbar El-Yom: "In my personal opinion, Arab participation in the Doha conference is a good opportunity to isolate Israel and show its true colours to the world. A strong Arab presence at Doha is far better than the negative fallout arising from the boycott of a conference held in an Arab country. Differences between Arab countries and the ruling regime in Qatar should be resolved in private and not aired before their enemies. If there is no way of preventing the conference from being held, then it is best that the Arabs all attend in order to oppose the Israeli delegation and force it into isolation."
(Ibrahim Saada, 18 October)

October: "Mr Netanyahu claims he is combating 'Palestinian terrorism,' but in reality he has become the official patron of both Palestinian and Israeli terrorism. It is he who plans Mossad's murderous operations and arms groups hostile to the PLO in order to undermine Palestinian and Israeli initiatives. He is out to widen the gulf between the Arabs and the Israelis and to portray the Palestinians as terrorists. Is there anything more dangerous to the region than dealing with an impetuous man like Netanyahu? Is there anything more [illegible] doubt that the greatest danger to Israeli security is Mr Netanyahu himself?"
(Ragab El-Banna, 19 October)

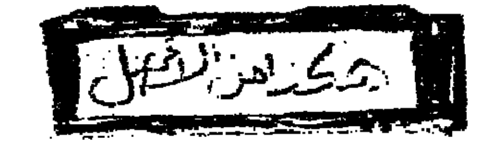
Al-Wafd: "If the Arabs can cooperate among themselves it is far better for them to attend the Doha conference and isolate Israel. To boycott the event would give Israel the opportunity to pose as victim before the world and ask for more economic and military aid. What the Arabs should do is cooperate to the fullest extent while refusing to have any dealings with Israel, along the lines of the Cairo conference. In this way Israel will achieve nothing."
(Sanaa El-Said, 19 October)

Al-Gomhuria: "An Arab boycott of Doha will not solve the Middle East crisis or bring the peace process back on track. What the Arabs should avoid is falling into an Israeli trap and enter into a confrontation with the US at a difficult time. This would give Israel the opportunity to exert strong pressure throughout the US administration, including the new presidential candidate, to turn the US against the Arabs. There are many ways of dealing with this 'bitter' conference and there are many ways of 'aborting it — but the easiest way is isolating Netanyahu. There is no power that can force us to cooperate and open our markets to an aggressive and coercive regime."
(Mahfouz El-Ansari, 19 October)

Rose El-Youssef: "The fact that Binyamin Netanyahu did not fall from power after engineering the attempted assassination of Khaled Misha'al in Jordan shows that there is something wrong with Israeli society. Netanyahu presented his crisis as a national Israeli one and the opposition responded by dealing with it with restraint, toning down its call for his resignation. Does this not indicate that something is wrong and that political differences in Israel are in fact suddenly forgotten in crisis situations? There are voices for peace which run contrary to Netanyahu but few within Israeli society listen to them."
[illegible]



Nelson Mandela's face bears the imprints of suffering and sainthood. But his is not the ethereal halo of martyrdom: his features cannot be dissociated from his long struggle for freedom and humanity, the struggle to liberate South Africa from apartheid and oppression. His face today, as he visits Egypt, is not that different from that of the young revolutionary who began to fight half a century ago, even if the black hair has turned to grey, coal to ash in the furnace of the prison, and even if the years have etched lines around the eyes that smile, despite it all. I exaggerated the length of his neck, thinking [illegible]



Close up
Salama A. Salama
Murder on the Nile



Close up

Salama A. Salama

Murder on the Nile

It will take *many* years of concentrated effort to remove all the excrescences that have sprung up along the banks of the Nile, and to protect the great river from pollution. A firm stand will have to be taken on infringements of any kind, regardless of the position of the perpetrators, although their status is largely if not entirely responsible for this assault on the banks of the Nile.

This was emphasised by Dr Mahmoud Abu Zeid, minister of public works and water resources, in answer to fears that the implementation of the project decreed by the prime minister will encounter many obstacles, not least *among* them the manipulation of the law to suit the interests of profit-hungry individuals and associations. He has promised that this plan will be implemented not only in the Greater Cairo area, but along the Nile banks from Aswan down to its estuaries at Rashid and Damietta.

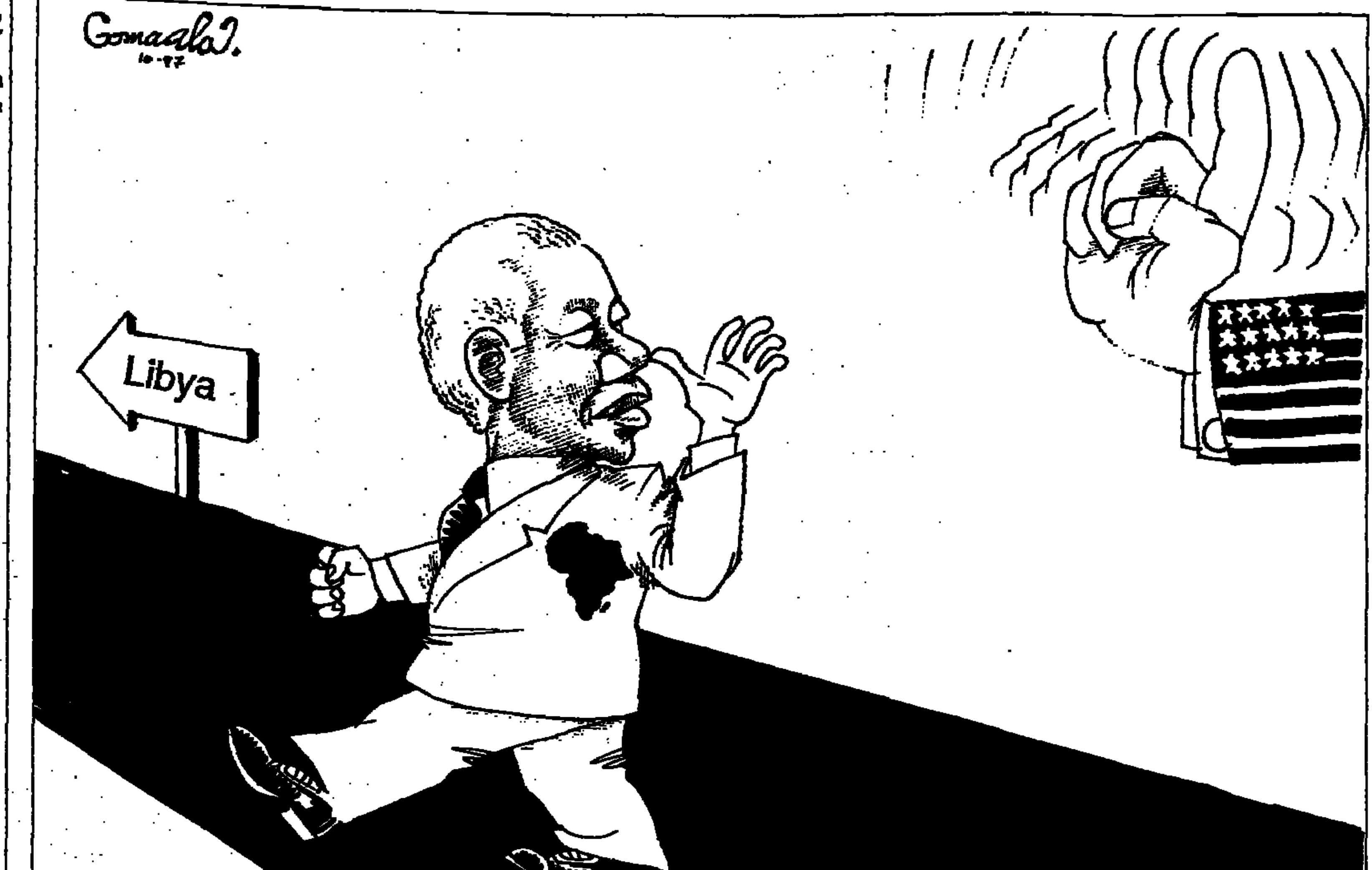
He also affirmed that one-year permits would be suspended to allow for the codification of the decree, determine the necessary fines, and notify owners that they must remove their structures at their own expense, within the one-year grace period. This will not be a truce, after which the assault on the river banks will resume, he promised. Anyone who refuses to remove a building will be forced to pay for its removal by the government. The scale of the assault on the Nile is revealed by the number of infringements along the river in general, and the figures for the governorates of Cairo and Giza in particular, where 465 illegal structures have been recorded. Only 160 have been removed; the remainder still await demolition. The minister of public works and the governors of Cairo and Giza will need all the patience they can muster, if they are to prevent law-breakers from using all the wiles and tricks at their disposal to circumvent laws and state decrees.

The common use of brute force and influence among riverside entrepreneurs is not much cause for optimism, however. A university professor, Dr Ali Osman, was shocked to witness the massacre of trees in and around the Frontier Corps Officers' Club in Zamalek. Officials told him they were only following the new governor's orders to remove any objects that blocked a view of the river. Most probably, these trees will soon be transformed into coffee tables. It is safe to assume that the governor of Cairo has absolutely no knowledge of the affair.

It is time to lay down rules for *the felling* of trees in Egypt. From Zaire to Abu Dhabi, the US to Australia, every country in the world today is aware of the importance of greenery and its crucial role in the fight against pollution. Deforestation is one of the greatest barriers in the battle to halt desertification, and even the felling of isolated trees is carefully monitored around the world.

Trees are fixed assets, like machinery and buildings, and cannot be disposed of without very valid reasons. Yet wanton destruction and manipulation of the law are a test for the best intentions. Are the government's efforts to plan the city and issue decree upon decree to be subverted by heartless criminals?





Soapbox

The 'other' syndicate

Israel is still the Arabs' greatest enemy, for, despite the peace agreements, the Arab territories are still under occupation.

Normalisation is not the point here. The issue is loyalty to the nation-state, and the Arab nation as a whole, as well as the responsibilities of writers and journalists to the public consensus that rejects any cooperation with Israel, as long as the occupation of the Arab lands continues. There can be no dialogue with this racist state, regardless of who its prime minister may be.

The justification given by those throwing themselves at Israel is the Egyptian government's commitment to the peace treaty, which calls for the normalisation of official relations with Israel. But Egyptian civil society is under no obligation to pursue normalisation. Nor is it committed to cooperate with any organisation in Israel.

A few Egyptian journalists have turned their backs, not only on the consensus of Egyptian journalists, but on that of the nation as a whole. These individuals have broken ranks with the Egyptian press, and violated the resolutions issued by the general assembly of the Arab Journalists' Syndicate. They must be brought to account, and the Egyptian Journalists' Syndicate has demanded that they appear before an investigations committee.

Some advocates of normalisation have attempted to formulate ominous-sounding objections to the "new McCarthyism", and to claim that their freedom of opinion has been violated. But this is not a matter of freedom of expression. Since these journalists refuse to abide by the syndicate's rules, why do they insist on remaining members? I am sure that the "other" syndicate will welcome them with open arms.



This week's Soapbox speaker is a senior journalist and managing editor of Al-Ahram.

Ihsan Bakr

An evening with Che

Abdel-Azim Anis recalls an encounter with a young revolutionary, his courage and his romantic idealism

My telephone rang. It was a day in early March 1965. My wife was in hospital due to pregnancy-related complications. She was carrying our daughter Hanan, who was born five months later. When the phone rang, I thought it was my wife, but it turned out that the call was from the Egyptian writer and journalist Ihsan Abdel-Quddous, who wanted to invite my wife and myself to dinner that evening, along with a number of others, in honour of Che Guevara, who was in Cairo. Before going to Ihsan's home, I called on my wife at hospital, and remember being at a loss whether I should tell her about the invitation. I was afraid that, in her eagerness to meet the famous Cuban revolutionary, she would check out of the hospital that night. In the end, I only told her about the invitation several days later, earning myself severe rebuke.

When I arrived at Ihsan's home that evening, Che Guevara was there, along with the Cuban ambassador. Also present were Khaled Mohieddin and his wife, Ahmed Bahaeddin and his wife, Ahmed Hamroush and his wife and the Egyptian film star Faten Hamama. There were so many other prominent figures that I find it difficult to remember all their names. I do recall, however, that Fouad Al-Rikabi, an Iraqi minister at the time, was there, as was Moussa Sabri. After the dinner I suggested that we hear from Che Guevara on a number of issues, and a group of us withdrew to Ihsan's study to have a quiet discussion. In the room with us were, among others, Khaled Mohieddin, Ahmed Bahaeddin, the Cuban ambassador and Moussa Sabri, who, a week later, published a lengthy article in *Akher Sa'a* magazine (17 March 1965) about the discussion, which lasted until two in the morning. I addressed most of the questions. Che was speaking in French, I in English, the Cuban ambassador was acting as interpreter and Ahmed Bahaeddin helped out on several occasions in French.

Certain events determined the content of the interview. For example, at the time, Guevara had just returned from the Three Continents Conference in Algeria, where he sharply criticised the socialist countries (particularly the Soviet Union, although he did not mention it by name) for their commercial dealings with developing countries on the basis of the prices of raw materials in the international capitalist market. Also, I personally at the time was preoccupied with the process of building socialism in a small island country such as Cuba, under blockade from all directions by the US. What difficulties did socialism encounter under such circumstances, I wondered? Was it really possible to build a socialist state in a country that size? Naturally, I was concerned with the ramifications of these questions on Egypt, and particularly the likelihood of the success of the experiment of heavy industrialisation in small countries.

A second preoccupation of mine was the confrontation between the US and Cuba, only 90 miles south of the American coastline. True, the 1962 missile crisis under Kennedy ended peacefully, but, I wondered, how long would America continue to respect Cuba's independence?

Che Guevara was very obliging in his answers to my questions. Building a socialist state in a small country such as Cuba, he said, was difficult indeed. Applying socialist principles in a vast country such as the Soviet Union posed problems very different to the attempt to apply these principles in a small developing country. In their enthusiasm for socialism, the Cuban people had wanted to shift the mode of production from one based on agriculture (largely devoted to sugarcane) to industry. Little attention was given to long-term planning. Initially they set a target of allocating 70 per cent of national investment to industrial development and 30 per cent to public service enterprises. Three years later they discovered that precisely the reverse had occurred: 30 per cent of investment had gone into industry while 70 per cent went into public services. I believe he also had Egypt in mind when he said that this is a particularly acute problem for peoples of the Third World, who are in such dire need of educational and health services after a long period of deprivation.

Guevara said that one of Cuba's mistakes had been to try to emulate Czechoslovakia's experience in building a socialist country. I asked him, why Czechoslovakia in particular? For no particular reason, he answered, other than the fact that Czechoslovakia had sent Cuba detailed reports on its experience and the Cubans were so ardent to realise the socialist ideals that they pressed forward in trying to implement the Czechoslovakian model without proper planning. Afterwards, they had to spend many years correcting their mistakes.

Guevara added that the capitalist world had changed considerably since the days of Karl Marx. In any event, Marx had not formulated specific solutions for putting socialist theory into practice. Moreover, in light of the changes in the world, many of Marx's tenets, not least the concepts of profit and incentive, would have to be revised. He himself, he said, did not have any ready solutions, but the questions concerning the application of socialism in developing countries should be subjected to extensive study.

Although Guevara was somewhat guarded in his response to my questions concerning his statements in Algeria against the socialist countries' commercial dealings with Cuba, we could clearly detect the bitterness the Cuban leaders felt, particularly toward the USSR. To my mind, the issue went beyond commercial concerns, however important. In 1965 the acrimony between Moscow and Peking was blatant. Many revolutionaries believed that Cuba sympathised with China but that its security and economic interests forced it to avoid provoking any tensions in its relations with Moscow. From my contacts in Cuba, I was personally aware of the depth of the disgruntlement in Havana and the extent of the growing resentment since the end of the Cuban missile crisis, when Kennedy and Kruschev signed the agreements resolving that crisis without the least regard for the views of the Cuban leaders.

When our conversation turned to the future of Cuba's relations with the US, Guevara was not as forthcoming. Indeed, his answers were somewhat curt, as though he wanted to end the interview. I thought at the time that he felt that it was getting late and that he probably wanted to leave. It was, after all, two in the morning. Later, however, after hearing the news of Guevara's death in Bolivia in 1967 and after having read Régis Debray's *Revolution in the Revolution*, I began to suspect that Guevara, already during that meeting in Ihsan Abdel-Quddous's home in 1965, had reached the resolve to leave Cuba for Bolivia and to give priority to the cause of the anti-imperialist struggle in Latin America over the cause of building socialism in Cuba.

Che Guevara was a great revolutionary and a man of rare courage. He was also very much a romantic idealist. Nothing could illustrate this more than the fact that, in Bolivia, he broke with the Bolivian Communists, and was isolated from the Bolivian peasants in whose name he fought. Equally indicative of this is the fact that Debray, the primary theorist behind the concept that the revolutionary struggle creates the political party and not the reverse, eventually relinquished his radical ideas and was the adviser to French President Mitterrand until the president's death.

The writer is professor emeritus at Ain Shams University.

Reflections By Hani Shukrallah

Beneath 'common' ground

The "Copenhagen Declaration", issued under northern European patronage by a small group of Israeli and Arab "intellectuals" in the Danish capital some seven months ago, was a non-event. Largely ignored by the international and Israeli media, it was destined to win a certain dubious prominence only through the fierceness of the attacks against it in one of the participating countries, namely Egypt.

Basically designed as a way of assuring the Israeli public of the neighbouring Arab peoples' peaceful intentions, thereby assuaging the Israelis' limitless "security concerns", under-cutting Netanyahu's "security" agenda, and strengthening the Israeli "peace camp", the "initiative" turned upon itself, producing exactly the opposite of what, at least, its Arab protagonists set out to do. The Israeli public only learned of Copenhagen in the context of its fierce and ferocious rejection in the largest neighbouring Arab country. If Copenhagen had an effect on Israeli public opinion at all, which is doubtful, it was not to reduce, but rather to underline, the alleged "security concerns" of the Israelis.

So even within its own terms, which I believe to be totally faulty, the whole Copenhagen affair was a fiasco, an exercise in futility, as I wrote at the time.

Following the uneventful event, I wrote a series of four articles commenting on, and criticising the so-called Copenhagen Initiative/Declaration/Alliance. This, I was told by a friend, prompted a reader to make the admittedly clever remark that "for something he calls a non-event, he has not ceased writing about it." And now, seven months later, I am writing again on the same subject. In my defense, I must say that, throughout, my real concern has not been the Copenhagen affair itself as the underlying questions it poses. This, and the promise, implicit in the discussion and underlined at the time by Mohamed Sid-Ahmed, of it triggering an intensive, serious and wide-ranging debate on the wider strategic issues surrounding the Palestinian question and the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the issue of "normalisation" and its rejection, central to the debate on Copenhagen.

Meanwhile, however, not only has the debate on Copenhagen raged virtually unabated in Egypt, lately, it has taken an especially nasty turn; a virtual witch-hunt against Copenhagen's main Egyptian protagonists, Lutfi El-Kholi and Abdel-Moneim Said, peaking in an arbitrary and legally dubious Press Syndicate Council decision to initiate disciplinary proceedings against them, with the threat of expulsion from the syndicate.

This latter aspect added a moral obligation to engage in the debate not just vis-à-vis its substantive issues, but also to make one's position clear on the punitive turn it has taken, accompanied as it has been by a campaign of personal invective and character assassination, singling out El-Kholi and Said as "normalisers" who should be excoriated and excommunicated from the community of Egyptian intellectuals.

Not only is such a mode of criticism reprehensible in itself — it works easily both ways, as some of the responses have revealed — but also it debases the debate, assuming, on the one hand, that the issues involved are self-evident truisms, which therefore need not be explored or discussed further, but acted upon, and on the other, throwing us back into the circle of "red lines" which cannot be crossed either in thought or in practice — an authoritarian inclination which has consistently done irreparable harm to the Palestinian cause, and to the interests of the Arab peoples in general.

Indeed, we now have a highly anomalous situation in which a single manifestation of an overwhelmingly dominant process appears beleaguered, hounded and persecuted. This creates a totally false picture of reality, reminiscent of the days when the Arabs talked loudly of war while Israel actually waged it. A very similar process is at work here. What is at issue is the possibility of an alternative to the current peace process, which in form and content, down to the smallest detail, is nothing but an American-Israeli peace. It is absurd to assume that such an alternative is self-evident at a time when the greatest source of strength of the peace process discourse is derived, not from any progress this process has made in achieving Palestinian and Arab rights, but rather from the lack of strategic alternatives.

In part, the obsession with Copenhagen and the mode of "criticism" chosen by a fairly wide section of those who spoke out against it, seems to be both a function of this lack of alternatives and an attempt to side-step the very real and urgent task of critically developing them. This in turn raises the question of whether some of the critics are in fact interested in developing an alternative to the current American-Israeli-driven peace process.

The fact that such an effort remains largely absent is a clear indication that Egyptian and Arab intellectuals are not as sharply or clearly polarised as much of the Copenhagen debate would appear to imply. Indeed, one of the salient features of the debate is that both the anti- and the pro-Copenhagen camps include some very strange bed-fellows.

The real sin of Copenhagen lies, in my own view, in the fact that it is a sub-text of the main discourse of the current peace process, whose fundamental logic is to distort, obfuscate, indeed smother completely, the true essence of the so-called Arab/Palestinian-Israeli conflict. To lay claim to seeking a "*just* solution" while at the same time constructing a whole edifice of concepts, images, institutions, processes and structures whose paramount aim is to cover up, perpetuate and reconstitute fundamental injustice, is the basic logic of the American-sponsored Arab-Israeli peace-constructed-as-process. The high-sounding moral pretensions of this peace process are perhaps unprecedented, but its actual basis lies in a crass realism: the defeated concede defeat, the powerless acknowledge their powerlessness, the dispossessed accept their dispossession.

The Western world may accept, for reasons of guilt, expediency or both, that a whole nation is destroyed, both physically and symbolically; its people are forcibly ethnically cleansed from the land in which they lived, tilled and harvested for centuries; thousands of towns and villages are erased from the map; land is usurped wholesale; Israel is constructed as a "Jewish State" in spite of the fact that 20 per cent of its population are Palestinian Arabs; these Palestinian Arabs have lived for half a century as second class citizens in the land of their forefathers, maligned, abused and dispossessed till eternity; some four million Israelis have ruled by force over 2.5 million Palestinians for 30 years, squeezing them out of their remaining land, starving them into submission, denying them the most basic rights of citizenship (accorded, at least formally, to every other people on this planet, since the collapse of Apartheid in South Africa); some four million other Palestinians remain in the Diaspora, denied even the hope of returning to their land, humiliated and mistreated by almost every nation in the world, denied — in one of the most astounding defilements of logic and morality in the modern world — a right of return to homes they were pushed out of between 30 and 50 years ago, while that right is accorded automatically to any Jew living anywhere in the world on the basis of a mythical 2,000-year-old right.

They may accept that "Jewish blood" is immeasurably more precious than Arab blood, that where the "Jews" are concerned such things as institutionalised and legally sanctioned torture, collective punishment against a whole population, the destruction of homes, the taking of hostages, the vicious murder of hundreds of civilians, the most despicable forms of terrorism, are all sanctioned, all legitimate, all acts of "self-defence", an assertion of the Israeli state's "right to protect Jewish blood". We cannot.

Simply, we are not "peace-makers" and "anti-peace forces" as the peace process discourse, including the Copenhagen interlude, would like to construct us, but oppressor and oppressed, usurper and dispossessed, the aggressor and the victim of aggression. This is the fundamental divide, and like all oppression it is a structure, one that is integral to the Zionist project in Palestine and the Middle East. Zionism is Jewish supremacism, just as Apartheid in South Africa was White supremacism.

Recently, Edward Said wrote in this newspaper that: "The greatest victory of Zionism has been a sustained one for a whole century: to persuade Jews and others that 'a return' to an empty land is the proper, indeed the only solution for the afflictions of genocide and anti-semitism. What has been totally lost in this project of course is the exorbitant price paid by Palestinians who, as invisible, silent, or mainly irrational and violent 'lesser' beings, have all along been considered sacrificeable to the grand Zionist fulfilment."

From this, he concludes: "Unless we mobilise ourselves and our friends and, above all, our voices so that the Zionist project can be systematically shown for what it is and was, we can never expect any change in our status as an inferior and dominated people."

Copenhagen's basic sin is not that Egyptian or other Arab intellectuals met with Israelis, or engaged in "dialogue" with them, but that the very notion of "dialogue", as constructed by its American, European and Israeli patrons, is an ideological statement specifically designed to gloss over the fundamental fact and dividing line of oppression and injustice, to formulate "the conflict" in terms of such things as psychological barriers, history of hatred and mutual mistrust, cultural and religious divides, and so on. Not only is the fact of past and present oppression to be smothered, but a new dividing line is to be created, not between oppressor and oppressed, but between so-called "peace makers" and "enemies of peace".

To try and search for "common ground" — as an older, on-going, more discreet if less reputable project of Arab-Israeli "dialogue" is called — with the Zionist project: that is the real sin of Copenhagen. For the "common ground" gnaws at our very souls, at our will to struggle. The concrete political and military arrangements of the current peace process, even in treaty form, are ultimately things of the moment — *a whole history* of liberation struggles shows us that inequitable and unjust treaties and arrangements, however iron-clad, however seemingly immutable, can be and are overturned in moments. It is a people's will to struggle, to quote Edward Said again, that is their most precious possession; and it is a product of vision and awareness.

M. KHODEIR P.O.BOX 1057, CAIRO 11511, TEL:418-0034/418-0035 FAX:418 28 83

Al-Ahram Weekly

23 - 29 October 1997

'A rare spirit'

Hala Halim remembers Soad Sobhi, whose death last week robs students at Alexandria University of an inspired teacher and generous friend



It was 10 years ago that I had my first conversation with Dr Soad Sobhi, on the way back to Alexandria from Damanhour University where we both taught as delegates. Then a junior lecturer in the English Department, Faculty of Arts, Alexandria University, I was hoping to write a comparative study of Alexandrian poetry for my MA thesis and Dr Soad, whose PhD viva on Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* I had attended two years before, seemed the ideal person to consult.

The strict hierarchy which lends a certain rigidity to life at Alexandria University was nowhere discernible in Dr Soad's manner. A strikingly beautiful woman, she was without airs and graces, seeming, indeed, almost timid. Sitting in the crammed bus we were soon chatting away about her MA thesis on Beckett, about her trip to England where she had worked on the manuscript of *The Quartet*, and about the material she could lend me. The rest of the conversation is a blur, though I still remember the sense of optimism I felt as the bus swung onto the Corniche.

The daughter of Hussein Sobhi, one-time head of the Alexandria Municipality and a patron of the arts who founded the Museum of Fine Arts (later to bear his name) and the Alexandria Biennale for Mediterranean Countries, Soad Sobhi's extended family included the distinguished artist and political activist Injy Aflatoun. With her husband Galal Aref, Professor at the Faculty of Medicine and, through his pediatrician's practice, a household name in the city, Soad was very much part of the cultural scene in Alexandria. Glimpsed at various functions amid their circle of friends, they stood out as a very handsome couple, radiating that kinship — a sort of physical resemblance to each other — which often characterises the best of marriages. Working in different spheres, the couple's interests nevertheless overlapped. In the acknowledgments that preface her PhD dissertation, Sobhi writes "I would also like to thank my husband Galal Aref who, together with Dr Asser Zaki, has been of great help in relation to the scientific part of the thesis."

Soon after the bus conversation, I visited Soad Sobhi's flat to borrow her thesis and browse through her books. She showed me her prized possession, a painting by the Alexandrian artist Clea Badaro (one of the originals for the Clea of *The Quartet*) hung in the dining room, then moving through rooms full of her sons and their friends, her students and cats, we settled in her study.

"Lawrence Durrell the Fabulator: A Foreign Perspective of Egypt in *The Alexandria Quartet*", Sobhi's thesis, was a comparative work drawing on a variety of disciplines and fields of knowledge — Einsteinian relativity, psychoanalysis and mysticism, among others — to elucidate the ideas that inform Durrell's experimental magnum opus. But it is arguable that her main contribution is in her chapter on "Durrell's Alexandria, an Orientalist Perspective of Egypt".

Before her thesis Egyptian critical responses to *The Alexandria Quartet* comprised only a handful of essays, the most important being Professor Mahmoud Manzalaoui's acerbic article "Curate's Egg: An Alexandrian Opinion of Durrell's *Quartet*". Writing "as an Arab and Alexandrian", Sobhi draws on post-colonial theory to situate *The Quartet* within the discourse of empire, tracing the various orientalist leitmotifs that typecast Alexandria as "the Other", as "Europe's shadow", the confrontation with which prompts "the gradual growth of an artist" — the main theme of the work as she sees it.

Over the following years I saw Dr Sobhi sporadically, until a campaign to save from demolition the house in which Lawrence Durrell once lived brought us together. She supplied me with contact numbers of people to interview, bundled me in her small car, and together with her students and colleagues, we took off to her cabin in Montaza where she introduced me to an elderly family friend on whom she doted, Egypt's first female PhD, Dr Dorreya Fahmy. Fahmy had been close of the artist Effat Nagui who lived in the — now half demolished — atelier in the garden of the mansion where Durrell and his roommates had rented a floor.

About two months later, in Athens, still on the trail of material on Durrell, I betook myself to the archives of the Greek community in Egypt. There, I had been told, I would find photographs taken by Durrell's friend, Dimitri Papadimos, during the writer's 1977 visit to Alexandria when the BBC documentary *Spirit of Place* was filmed. I still remember the thrill of coming across several portraits of Dr Soad with an Indian silk scarf draped around her head. She had told me that she had met Durrell during his 1977 visit, as she was already working on her thesis, but she was too modest to add that she had been dubbed Justine, as I found out from the diary of Peter Adam, the director of the film:

"The girl we baptise 'Justine' comes to the hotel with a copy of the book *Justine*, and Larry [Durrell] signs it cheerfully. He asks Dimitri, his old photographer friend who has come with us, to take a photograph of him, and while clowning around at the table, he baptises the photograph 'Elephant slicing Feta'."

Then, in '96, came the big challenge of Dr Sobhi's career: she was to be the director of the Ninth International Lawrence Durrell Conference, to be held in Alexandria "in celebration of the City and the *Quartet*" as billed in the flyer. Aware of the expectations international Durrell experts would bring to their visit to Alexandria, she was determined her city's round of the conference would be without organisational hitches and perfectly *comme il faut*. During the year-long preparations for the event, which she undertook with hardly any support from the Faculty of Education at whose English Department she was acting head, Dr Soad and her husband left no stone unturned in promoting and finding sponsors for the conference.

Conceptually, Dr Soad's imprint was palpable in the balance in the papers between mainstream Durrell scholarship and — this mostly the Egyptian conferees' perspective — post-colonial approaches to his work. But it was in the many activities and excursions she organised on the fringe that Dr Soad's creativity manifested itself. These were carefully chosen to spotlight settings and themes relevant to *The Alexandria Quartet*. There was the walk through Durrell's Alexandria, a trip to the Monasteries of Wadi El-Natroun during which the conferees met Pope Shenouda III, an excursion to the Alamein cemeteries and a visit to Rosetta, walks through the Roman Amphitheatre and Kom El-Shogafa Catacombs with commentary by the eminent Alexandrian historian Mustafa El-Abbadi. This apart from a reception she and her husband hosted at Montaza and a folkloric dance gala held at Qait Bey Fort. "The conference", reflects her colleague Professor Nazek Fahmi, "was the crowning achievement of her life."

In the last year of her life, as she struggled stoically with cancer, Dr Sobhi continued to supervise her graduate students' work and presented the research papers needed for her professorship, a promotion which, happily, she lived to see. Dalia Said El-Hawari, a demonstrator at the Faculty of Education whose MA thesis Dr Soad was supervising, remembers her unflagging encouragement even during that last year, her unstinting generosity with her books "which she gave, rather than lent." El-Hawari and her colleagues Heba Sharoubim and Nehad Helail, all attest to the personal interest she took in her students, despite the large numbers and her heavy teaching schedule — giving a second chance to a student who had failed an exam as his father had died two days earlier, proffering out of her own pocket funds for the undergraduates' magazine, opening up her house for rehearsals of Shakespearean plays, having the students over at Montaza on Fridays. As a teacher's teacher, too, Dr Sobhi "gave you the freedom to be as creative and innovative as possible... she was very keen on collaboration between teachers", says Sharoubim.

Ian MacNiven, Lawrence Durrell's biographer, sums up the emotions of all those who had the privilege of interacting with Dr Soad Sobhi: "Soad will always live in our hearts and memories. She has left this physical world at the height of her achievement and charm, and it is thus that we must think of her, never old, never in defeat. She had a rare spirit."

Soad Sobhi, professor of English Literature, Alexandria University, Durrell scholar, translator — recipient of the Columbia University Prize and Arab League translation award for Mahfouz's Hakayat Haretna *— born Giza, 1946, died Alexandria, 17 Oct, 1997.*

Music

Ripping the rope

David Blake sees what's left and hears what's coming

Cairo Symphony Orchestra; Mozart: Symphony No. 31 in D major (Parisian); Alban Berg: Concerto for violin and orchestra, soloist Anastasia Tchebotareva; Beethoven: Symphony No 3 in E flat major (Eroica); conductor Ahmed El-Saedi; Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, 18 October

This concert looked formal enough, at each end two slices from the routine classical loaf, immovable icons both, royal and unshakable.

But the middle — this was another proposition: 20th century, seismic, a trembling on the brink. Revolution? No, worse, for the formal walls of society were cracking open — moral break-up. Berg leaves this shuddersome prospect wide open in a violin concerto which finishes with the longest sigh in music.

But Mozart began. The *Paris* was not for Paris, it was for Mozart himself. He was part of the break-up that erupted later, in the 20th century. He was bursting at the seams, witness *Don Giovanni* with the help of Da Ponte. The establishment called his later music unplayable. It does well to remember that by the end of his life Mozart had lost his audience.

The Cairo Symphony Orchestra and El-Saedi began the symphony. It sounded self-satisfied and pompous, like a well-laid out palatial lawn. There are no surprises in the *Paris*. We know our way around this Versaille. Every tree and fountain, every drop glitters. The audience and Mozart had seen it all before — that is the secret of the Paris symphony. Mozart was tiring of the classical mould. A little midnight nostalgia in the *andante*, then on to the hunt and the party after the chase, when the dead quarry has been brought to the palace. Mozart had been everywhere, but increasingly he was the unseen invitée at all the best parties, a relief to both sides, he wrote to his father. He had become a fly. He left the footprints of a fly — small, neat, but cyanide encrusted. Poison lasts.

As the Paris symphony slips elegantly into its final *allegro* and the chase charges on, it is a gift to Cairo music that there is an ensemble speed-orientated enough to keep up with the conductor. For El-Saedi speed is a passion. His critics mouth complaints. They say they see nothing, that everything merges into a blur, but the benefits are many. No time to say we've seen it all before. With El-Saedi, we are lucky to see it or hear it all. In this over-famous classical music, there are no *longeurs*, no easy passing, and the music never drags. El-Saedi made side swipes at the stately *Paris*, shaking up its perpendicular architecture. The Doric pilasters held their position, but only just. And the *Paris* rattled into the parking area, dusty, but newly young.

In Cairo there is no time to sit down. The onward rush is unforgiving to leisure. So the intermission before the Berg *Violin concerto* was a bore.

Finally it began. It is a sublime manifestation of a century, a time, like something passing, a rock, before it crashes to pieces in the void below. What really is it? A violin concerto? Much more, but a thing without a name. Energy made audible perhaps, the rope of the Norns after it had been torn to shreds. The Berg concerto is like a ripping to pieces, one of the great musical events of the century. Sometimes the tearing of the musical fabric is so beautiful it goes beyond mere tears.

The performance by all concerned was a triumph. Alban Berg had everything: looks, charm, genius. One of his musical ideas was enough to keep Stravinsky going for life. Musically he was as nymphomanic as his operatic creation *Lulu*: He sped from one love to another, classless, lawless, inspired, pitiless and charming. This mix was his music. His two operas, *Lulu* and *Wozzeck*, have changed opera like nothing since Wagner. The music repels, but captivates. Far-out colours, volupté, decadence, yet firmly fixed in his Viennese idiom. The music is like a Rothko glazed by Estée Lauder moon-glow. He never forgot there must always be a listener, even if it is only yourself.

The *Violin concerto* was written in 1935, just before Berg's death, for the violinist Louis Kasner, and it begins with his feelings on the death of Manon Gropius, young daughter of Walter Gropius and Alma, his wife, the widow of Mahler. It is in two movements of four sections. The top note of a chord in one section is the root note of the following section and the entire concerto is an attempt to represent an aspect of the uncertainty principle, the tension between past and future. But all aspects of this theorising, which haunts the Viennese school, disappears as the concerto begins.

The violinist was Anastasia Tchebotareva. She weaves and spins her violin, like Cocteau's Sphinx, into webs of endlessly varying tone patterns. She leaves no room for criticism of her performance because she is one of the new young Russian musical fables. Without any sense of even noticing the work's horrible difficulties she begins and then goes through it with ease, an ease which allows her to display her deep understanding of the music's real importance.

Anastasia Tchebotareva

There is one passage in the concerto which is shuddersome, when the music gathers itself up into venom so explosive it shocks and leaves the violin to soar alone like a terrified, fluttering bat. Tchebotareva's arms flew so fast it seemed as though she would let fly the instrument, but she clung on gallantly to the end. She was an orange orchid of power and plenitude and brought this Berg concerto to an end on what is possibly the longest *rollentando* in music. Music, so simple and strange, shimmering with the shades of unease.

After this came Beethoven's *Eroica*. Is it likely to hold us in thrall after the Berg? Berg had kicked out Mozart. Not so easy with the *Eroica*, especially as it was played so well. Do the worlds converge? For sure, yes, because Beethoven knew everything. He had been there before Berg. He has the mighty classical sledge- hammer to hit with, but in his hands it is a wand of magic.

Berg's world ended in Hollywood and so will ours — and worse — but Beethoven, never. So the planet is blasted, Berg has become a classic and he will haunt his own graveyard. Beethoven, though, is too tough for death and grave talk.

There are the melodies, the tunes of the *Eroica*, there is the holy fire of Zeus and the noble truths of conjunctivity. More than enough.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Youth Salon
Centre of Arts, 1, Maahad El-Swissri, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 7pm-10pm.
Annual showing of new works by young artists.

Wafiq Madbouli Ayad
Exhibition Hall, Al-Ahram Building, El-Galaa St, Boulaq. Tel 5786100. Daily 9am-10pm.

1952, The Last Protocol: Official Coverage of Egypt's Royal Family at Work and Play
Sony Gallery for Still Photography, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5422. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 23 Oct.

Group Exhibition
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 23 Oct.
Works by Hussein Bicar, Mustafa Hussein and Makram Henein.

Marco Hillen (Photographs) and Aida Khalil (Paintings)
Cairo Atelier, 2, Karim El-Dawla St, Downtown. Tel 574 6730. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 24 Oct.

Sabri Ragheb (Paintings)
Ewart Gallery, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5423. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. Until 27 Oct.

Said Abdel-Rasoul (Paintings)
Khan El-Maghraby Gallery, 18 El-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-9pm. Until 28 Oct.

The Andalusian Ornamental Spirit
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, 20 Boulos Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 360 1746. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 10am-2pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 28 Oct.

Bookmarkers
French Cultural Centre, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 10am-2pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 30 Oct.
A collection of 80 bookmarks, from the 1930s to the 1990s.

Mohamed Abla (Paintings)
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St. Tel 578 4494. Daily exc Fri, 11am-9pm. Until 30 Oct.
Works under the title Ward El-Nil.

Franz Kafka
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St, Downtown. Tel 575 9877. Until 30 Oct.
Documents and photographs relating to the writer.

Susanne Popelka (Paintings)
Cairo Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab El-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, noon-8pm. Until 30 Oct.
New works portraying masks, eyes and bodies.

Fateeh Said (Sculpture) & Raffat Zaki (Drawings)
Dounia Gallery, 20 Abdel-Aziz Gawish St, Doctors' Tower, Bab El-Louq. Tel 355 8367. Daily 12noon-10pm. Until 30 Oct.

Nagui Moussa Basilious (Paintings)
Cairo Atelier, 2, Karim El-Dawla St, Downtown. Tel 574 6730. Opening 26 Oct, 7pm. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 31 Oct.

Sheikh Ramadan Abu Sweilam and Sayed Amin Fayed (Paintings)
Shomou' Gallery, El-Horreya Sq, Maadi. Tel 350 0081. Opening 27 Oct, 7pm. Daily exc Fri, 10am-7pm. Until 4 Nov.
Recent works on display.

Maja Soric (Paintings)
Sheba Gallery, 6 Sri Lanka St (Yehia Ibrahim St), Apt 1, Zamalek. Tel 340 9192. Daily exc Sun, 10am-8pm. Until 8 Nov.

Sarwat El-Bahr & Mounir Canaan (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Nessim St, corner of Montazah, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 9 Nov.

Essam Sedqi El-Gabakhangui (Paintings)
Gallery Salama, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Opening 27 Oct, 7pm. Daily 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 13 Nov.

Heinrich Böll: His Life and Works (Documents)
Goethe Institute, language studies department, 14 Hussein Wassef St, Missaha Sq, Dokki. Tel 348 4500. Until 13 Nov.

Omar El-Fayoumi (Paintings)
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 6pm-9pm. Until 14 Nov.

FILMS

Sans Toit Ni Loi
French Cultural Institute, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. 29 Oct, 7pm.
Directed by Agnès Varda (1985).

El-Mowaten Masri
French Cultural Institute, as above. 26 Oct, 7pm.
Directed by Salah Abu Seif (1991) and starring Omar Cherif.

German Films
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St (ex Bustan St), Downtown. Tel 575 9877.
23 Oct, 7pm: One Day (1965) directed by Egon Monk.
27 Oct, 7pm: Bread of the Past Years (1962) directed by Herbert Veseley.

Italian Films
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791.
25 Oct, 6.30pm: Matrimonio All'Italiana (1964), directed by V. De Sica; starring Marcello Mastroianni and Sofia Loren.
26 Oct, 6.30pm: Otto E Mezzo (1963) directed by F. Fellini; starring Marcello Mastroianni and Claudia Cardinale.

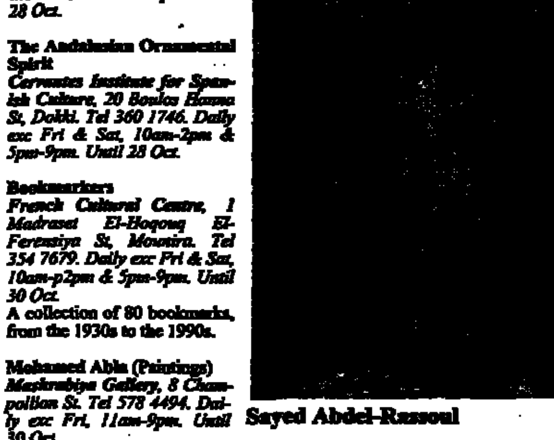
A Scene At the Sea
Japanese Information and Culture Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City. 23 Oct, 6pm.
Directed by Kitano Takeshi (1991).

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

The Lost World
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm & 6.30pm. Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Volcano
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Con Air
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm; Thur-Sat midnight show. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 591 6095. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.



Sayed Abdel-Rassoul

The Saint
Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.

Ismailia Rayeh Gaey (Ismailia Back and Forth)
Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Odeon II, Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 1am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9pm & 10pm.

Hanhab We Ne'eb (We'll Love and Rise Higher)
Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 1am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm. Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9pm & 10pm. Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Odeon I, Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Afrit El-Nahar (Daytime Demon)
Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

El-Masir (Le Destin)
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Odeon III, Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

DANCE

Modern Dance Theatre of Ankara
Gomhouriya Theatre, 12 Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. 27 & 28 Oct, 9pm.

Balletto Di Toscana
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 27-31 Oct, 8pm.

MUSIC

Jazz Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 23 & 24 Oct, 8pm.
Yehia Khalil performs.

Operetta Gala
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 23-25 Oct, 8pm.
The Cairo Symphony Orchestra, along with dancers and soloists of the Honved Ensemble Budapest present highlights of the Viennese Operetta.

The Telephone and Impresario
Gomhouriya Theatre, 12 Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. 25 & 26 Oct, 9pm.
The Cairo Opera Company and soloists Nevine Allouba, Nashwa Ibrahim, Mona Rafla, Mohamed Abul-Kheir, Raouf Zeidan and Abdel-Wahab El-Sayed perform under conductor Sherif Mohieddin.

Poetry and Piano Improvisations
Oriental Hall, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5423. 26 Oct, 8pm.
Valerie de Cassas, Jim Mayes and Nur El-Messiri read their poetry and Ashraf Fouad improvises at the piano in response to the poems.

El-Hanager String Ensemble
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. 27 Oct, 8pm.

Song Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 28 Oct, 8pm.
English composition performed by Mona Rafla, Alfy Melad, Ashraf Sweilam and Raouf Zeidan.

Chamber Music Concert
Ewart Hall, Main Campus, American University in Cairo. Tel 354 3874. 29 Oct, 8pm.

THEATRE

Three stories from The One Thousand and One Nights
Beit El-Harawi, behind El-Azhar mosque. Tel 340 4234. 28 Oct-3 Nov, 8.30pm.
Sherine El-Ansari tells the stories of Sharayar and Shah Zaman, Ward Fil-Akmam and Anas El-Wogoud and Dalila.

El-Milad (The Birth)
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 6.30pm. 23-31 Oct.

Bahlool Fi Istanbul
Hilton Ramsis Theatre, Hilton Ramsis annex, El-Galaa St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 10pm; Fri, 8.30pm.

Mama America
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, Qasr El-Nil St. Tel 575 0761. Sat & Sun 10pm; Mon 8pm.

'A'elat Wanis (Wanis' Family)
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, as above. Weds & Thurs, 10pm; Fri 8pm.

El-Zaim (The Leader)
El-Haram Theatre, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Nasr City. Tel 402 0804. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.

Cromb, Zabadi (Cabbage, Yogurt)
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10pm; Mon & Fri, 8pm.

Tarateeri II (Melody II)
El-Talia, Ataba Square, Downtown. Tel 937 948. Daily 10pm.

Leila Full (Jasmine Night)
Floating Theatre, Adjacent to University Bridge, Manial. Tel 364 9516. Daily exc Tues, 10pm.

Sonsohl
National, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 1267. Daily 9.30pm.

El-Qa'eda Wal Estethna' (The Rule and the Exception)
El-Zorqani Hall, National Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 7783. Daily 8.30pm.

Alabanda
El-Fardos Theatre, El-Beokh Sq. Tel 482 3017. Daily 8.30pm, Thur 9.30pm.

Ayam El-Insan El-Sab'a (The Seven Days of Man)
El-Ghouri Palace, El-Azhar, El-Hossein. Tel 511 0472. Daily 10pm.

LECTURES

Moulids, Saints and Sufis — Rural Mysticism in Egypt
Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies, 1 Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 23 Oct, 5.30pm.
Lecture by Dr Nicolaas Biegman, former Netherlands ambassador to Cairo.

From The Arab Conquest (641) to the Fatimids (969-1171)
American Research Centre, 2 Simon Bolivar Sq, Garden City. Tel 354 8239. 27 Oct, 5pm.
The first of the five slide lectures on the Islamic architecture of Cairo, by William Lyster.

Heinrich Böll and German Post-War Literature
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St (ex Bustan St), Downtown. Tel 575 9877. 28 Oct, 7pm.
Lecture, in Arabic, by Dr Tareq Abdel-Bari, Ain Shams University.

Approche Critique du Concept de Souveraineté en Relations Internationales
CEDEJ, 14 Gam'eyat El-Nisr St, Mohandessin. Tel 361 1932. 28 Oct, 5pm.
Lecture, in French, by Dr Bertrand Badie, Institute of Political Studies, Paris.

Christopher Columbus, A Man of His Time: The Discovery of the New World
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, 20 Boulos Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 360 1746. 29 Oct, 8pm.
Lecture by Paraguayan Ambassador Luis Fernando Meyer Canillas in commemoration of the 505th anniversary of the discovery of America.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please send information to Listings, Al-Ahram Weekly, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries



Hussein Bicar

SOUKS, and important historical moments, form the subject matter of paintings by **Hussein Bicar** on show at **Salama Gallery**. Also on exhibit are deft caricatures by **Mustafa Hussein** and technically accomplished drawings of Upper Egyptian women by **Makram Henein**.

Mashrabiya Gallery hosts mixed media paintings by **Mohamed Abla**. The Nile — flowing, polluted, a place in which to wade — is the source of inspiration for these interesting works.

Sculptures, 15 in all, in wood, iron and polyester resin, by **Arafa Shaker**, are on exhibit at the **Atelier du Caire**. These take the human form, the female form in particular, as their subject.

Reviewed by Nagwa El-Ashri

Nehad Selaiha looks at two ways of representing Ancient Egyptians on the stage

Another curse of the pharaohs

The depiction of Pharaonic figures on stage has always tended to the ludicrous; above, a vintage staging of the ancients

One evening, 15 years ago, at the end of a party at the Beacon Primary School in Exmouth (a small seaside town on the south-west coast of England), and while I, with the other mothers, armed with mops and brooms, were busy cleaning up the mess, one of my daughter's friends approached me gingerly and asked: "Do Egyptians live in little pyramids?" I was so startled and tickled by the question I found myself waving my broom dramatically and saying: "Oh, yes. And everyone has their own little camel parked outside." It was not that my daughter had been spinning yarns about Egypt to her friends behind my back and letting her imagination run riot; little Linda had simply seen too many travel posters sporting the Pyramids, the Sphinx, the desert and nothing else. For her, that summed up Egypt.

Over the years, our zealous efforts to build up the tourist industry have unwittingly resulted in propagating an image of Egypt as a land of sand, sumptuous sarcophagi, majestic tombs and funerary temples. In the process, the passion for life and its pleasures, which informed the Ancient Egyptians' intense preoccupation with immortality (including the immortality of the body) and the after-life (pictured as a replica of the earthly one) has been frequently mistaken for a morbid obsession with death. But if this ridiculously spurious image of Ancient Egypt can be excused in the highly competitive realm of tourism, it cannot be stomached in the realm of theatre. Indeed, at the risk of sounding sacrilegious, I must admit that I have reached a point where the mere mention of pharaohs or Ancient Egypt in connection with a performance is enough to make me run a mile.

In a wildly misguided quest for 'authenticity', directors have had us repeatedly suffer the excruciatingly embarrassing sight of puny, undernourished extras with spindly legs, dressed in short, linen kilts and sandals, and parading in broad, bib-like necklaces and some sort of Pharaonic headgear, while struggling to assume the rigidly linear postures of the human figures in Ancient Egyptian reliefs and paintings. The result is usually a lurid array of contorted limbs and I have often wondered if anyone in their right mind could really believe that our distant ancestors went about their daily business, farming, hunting, building pyramids and homes and making love with their palms turned rigidly upwards (in front of the chest or sideways) in continual supplication. Unfortunately, these stylised positions have become established theatrical signs for representing Ancient Egypt and recently surfaced in the National's current production of the story *Sinuhe*, wreaking havoc.

The damage was exacerbated by director Teymour Abashezde's skimpy, superficial handling of the narrative, evident in the absence of any directorial conception or point of view, in the disconcertingly facile adoption of the hero's perspective, and the unquestioning endorsement of his flimsy explanation of his motives and interpretation of his actions. To circumvent any criticism of his failure to make this ancient story significant or in any way relevant to today's audience, Abashezde asserts in the programme that he has deliberately chosen not to interfere with the narrative in any way out of respect for the scholars who had gone to so much trouble to put it together from several papyri; and, indeed, what we get in his production is an unexciting, straightforward recitation of the collated text, monotonously delivered by three actors and a chorus, and punctuated with bewildering ballet sequences to relieve the boredom.

Abashezde has obviously carried the virtue of 'non-interference' to absurd extremes. In the reading, the story proves a much more exciting experience: it springs vexing questions and reveals teasing gaps that the reader has to grapple with in order to make sense of the jumble of episodes and adventures and discover the underlying logic binding them. The first and most intriguing set of questions that face the reader have to do with Sinuhe's character and the reason behind his flight from Egypt: Why did this Middle Kingdom official in the court of Amenemhet I, who obviously enjoyed the king's favour since he was entrusted with his harem, decide to flee the country upon learning of the king's assassination? Was it simply fright or something more sinister? And if it was fear, of what or whom was he afraid? The story is opaque in this respect and Sinuhe evasively explains his action in terms of "the will of fate". Subsequent events make this explanation even more dubious and unsatisfactory since they reveal Sinuhe as a tough, ambitious man who succeeds in insinuating himself into the court and favour of a powerful Syrian chieftain, marries his eldest daughter, accumulates wealth and power, and ends up an invincible warrior and veritable patriarch, entertaining emissaries to and from Egypt.

The end of the story raises other questions: If Sinuhe wanted to spend his last days in Egypt and be buried there, why didn't he simply get up and go? Why did he have to wait for the pharaoh's forgiveness and permission? What was there to forgive? And why did the pharaoh, Sesostris I, shower him with gifts and favours on his return and order a fine tomb built for him?

Such questions and others are blithely ignored in the National's production where the director is content to let his cast, costumed in a weird medley of styles, declaim the "authorised version" of the story, with many histrionic gestures, in the middle of thick clouds of artificial smoke.

What a relief it was to escape the silly visual gimmickry, the vulgar Pharaonic paraphernalia, and the grating vocal pomposity and discordance of the National's *Sinuhe* and surrender oneself to the magic of Intisar Abdel-Fattah's *Hymn* at Al-Tali'a next door. The image that greets you from the stage as you walk in, in the soft light, is at once austerely geometrical and richly evocative. A still human figure, lying flat and covered with a thin white sheet, occupies centre stage with two women, in rough grey gowns, kneeling at its head and feet, and draping their long black hair over it. At the back, the chorus of grey-clad women and bare-chested men, sit cross-legged, ranged on two tiers, while the leader, a woman dressed in black, like a typical peasant from Upper Egypt, occupies the centre of the third, top tier, completing the pyramidal structure. Sitting up there, on her chair, with her hands serenely resting on her knees, and the light outlining her basic form against the black backdrop, and lending it drama by means of strong chiaroscuro, she seemed a vivid, living incarnation in the present of the distant past, a concrete metaphor for that elusive thing we call, for lack of a better phrase, the enduring essence of Egyptianness, or what Gamal Himdan has called "the genius of the place".



'I have often wondered if anyone in their right mind could really believe that our distant ancestors went about their daily business, farming, hunting, building pyramids and homes and making love with their palms turned rigidly upwards'

Flanking this pyramidal formation are two males on one side, a singer and a drummer, and two female singers on the other. The auditorium itself is likewise flanked at the back by two long staircases, down which two girls slowly descend, one wielding a curious, bell-shaped, twanging musical instrument (Intisar picked it up in India and has forgotten its name), and the other rhythmically beating two short wooden sticks, and approach the stage to announce the beginning of the performance. Another curious figure joins them: a half naked man, with a tree and a serpent tattoed on his back.

When these figures reach the stage, the drama begins, and by that time, the stage and auditorium have been figuratively transformed, through the stage composition and the deployment and movement of the human figures in the space, into the inside of a pyramid. Fittingly, the drama we watch is of birth and death and the cycle of life; and it is played in movement, in black and white, to the accompaniment of a haunting, original musical score for voices and percussion instruments. Here, as in his previous works, particularly the unforgettable *El-Darbukka*, Intisar, a composer turned director, turns the most ordinary of household objects into musical instruments, adding a wealth of new, exciting sounds to the familiar repertoire. And the chorus are also the orchestra.

Composed of sound and movement, *The Hymn* observes a delicate balance between its aural and visual elements and weaves them into an intricate, highly sophisticated artistic composition that impresses the viewer as being at once familiar, accessible and very lifelike, and yet remote and enduring. Like the Ancient Egyptian sculptors of the Old Kingdom, Intisar is primarily concerned here with the basic forms and the essentials; every lesser detail he leaves out. No wonder the duration of the work is only (and precisely) 35 minutes, and no wonder, too, that it has about it a kind of moving solemnity and graceful simplicity that one does not easily forget.

Books

Between Utopia and decadence

Mahmoud El-Wardani reviews some of the more interesting titles to have appeared in the last month

• *Wadaan Lil-Tabaqa Al-Wusta* (Adieu, the Bourgeoisie), Ramzi Zaki. Cairo: Dar El-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi, 1997

This, the latest book by the distinguished economist Ramzi Zaki, comprises two sections. In the first the author analyses the rise of neo-liberalism in the West after the fall of the Soviet Union and US dominance of the global economy, paralleled by the undermining of the legal structures necessary to combat the worst evils of capitalism. All over the world the right now refuses any state intervention, which has contributed to the increases in unemployment.

The second section is basically an eulogy of the bourgeoisie, which is about to become an artefact in an ethnological museum, be it in the West or in developing countries. Despite the exclusively economic focus of this book, it manages nevertheless to elucidate the recent social and political developments that have overtaken the world.

• *El-Madina El-Fadila* (Journey Through Utopia), Marie Louise Berneri, tr Attiyat Abul-Soud. Kuwait: Silsilat Alam Al-Maarifa Al-Kuwaitia, 1997

In this volume, Marie Louise Berneri presents a critical evaluation of the most celebrated utopias from ancient times via the Renaissance, the nineteenth century and modern times. The writers she tackles include Plato, Aristophanes, Plutarch, Francis Bacon and Thomas Campanella. The book's contribution lies in its exploration of the links between utopian thought and its social context.

• *Sefr El-Binyan* (The Book of Structuring), Gamal El-Ghitani. Cairo: Dar Al-Hilal, 1997

This, the most recent fictional work by Gamal El-Ghitani blends philosophical meditation and narrative in successive units: a term followed by a story, drawing on Pharaonic wisdom. The influence of architecture on the structure of El-Ghitani's fiction has long been observed; some critics even comparing it to the structure employed by the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes.

• *Yahruth Fil-Abar* (He Ploughs the Wells), Mohamed Ali Shamseddin. Beirut: Dar Al-Gadid, 1997

This collection of poetry by the Lebanese poet Mohamed Ali Shamseddin contains three sections: "Years of Insomnia", "From the Book of Light and Darkness" and "Poems of the Days", mostly written between 1993 and 1996.

• *Al-Tahlil Al-Nafsi Wal-Adab* (*Pschanalyse et littérature*), Jean Bellemin-Noel. Cairo: The Supreme Council of Culture, the National Project for Translation, 1997

Pschanalyse et littérature, made available to the Arab reader through the National Project for Translation, explores the relationship between psychoanalysis and literary theory. Giving pride of place to Freud's pioneering work, the author tackles the implications of a psychoanalytical approach to the reading of both the text and its author.

• *Harra' Mataha Qoutiya* (The Folly of a Gothic Labyrinth), Mustafa Zikri. Cairo: Dar Sharqiyat, 1997

Hitherto known as a short story writer and the author of the screenplay of the celebrated film *Afarit El-Asfalt* (Asphalt Demons), Mustafa Zikri has published his first novel *Harra' Mataha Qoutiya*. Although the writer designates his work as "two novels", the reader soon realises that they are a single text comprising two parts, distinguished by their narrative voices. In the first section, "What Amin Knows", we get a third person narrative while in the second, eponymous section we get a first person one. Drawing on popular Arab narratives such as the *One Thousand and One Nights*, this first time novelist shows a remarkable command of the language. His studies at the Cinema Institute, moreover, have stood him in good stead: his layering of image upon image creates a visually rich text.



Decline and fall? Ruben's Rape of the daughters of Leucippus

• *Idmihlal Wa Suqout Al-Imberatouriya Al-Roumania* (Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire), Edward Gibbon, ed D M Low. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1997

Since its appearance two centuries ago this book has never been out of print and has been translated into dozens of languages. In 1960, an abridged, three volume version of Gibbon's study, compiled by D M Low, was published in the US. This edition, now made available to the Arab reader, is helpfully annotated and cross-referenced.

• *Al-Garima Wal-'Eqab: A'idou Huqouq Al-Asra Wa Hakimou Al-Qatala* (Crime and Punishment: Restore the Rights of Prisoners and Put the Murderers on Trial). Cairo: The Egyptian Human Rights Organisation, 1997

Atrocities committed by Israeli army generals and soldiers against Egyptian war prisoners and civilians in 1956 and 1967 form the subject of this report, compiled by the Egyptian Human Rights Organisation.

The first chapter establishes the conceptual framework by setting out the rights of prisoners of war and civilians during armed struggle, as stipulated in international law. Another chapter provides a detailed account of the abuses of the human rights of Egyptians by Israelis during the aforementioned wars.

The second section of the report discusses the legal implications of Israeli actions under International Law as well as the individual responsibilities of the war criminals.

The whole issue was first broached in August 1995 when an Israeli officer disclosed to an Israeli national daily massacres of Egyptian prisoners of war in 1956 and 1967. The Egyptian Human Rights Organisation has since sponsored a campaign for the establishment of an international tribunal for the prosecution of Israeli war criminals.

Plain Talk

The post of secretary-general at the Department of Antiquities is one of the most coveted jobs in its field. Maybe this has a little to do with the glamour attached to the post — the secretary-general, after all, as part of his job, is charged with guiding official visitors to Egypt around the monuments. Yet, besides providing the opportunity to mix with kings, queens, and other visiting heads of state, the post also carries great responsibilities. In effect, its holder is the guardian of Egypt's incomparable archaeological heritage, the contemporary custodian of the glorious past.

There have been many holders of the post. Some have maintained a resolutely low profile, while others, such as Gamal Mukhtar, have left an indelible mark on the department.

Gaballa Ali Gaballa, the newly appointed secretary-general, is no stranger to the department he now heads, having begun his career as a member of its staff. During his time within the department he received a number of scholarships for further study, and after receiving his PhD embarked on an academic career. He was appointed to the staff of the Faculty of Antiquities and subsequently became its dean.

When Dr Gaballa begins his new job on Saturday he will face a number of problems that have been deferred for some time. In an interview with one of the leading daily newspapers, he outlined the path he hopes to follow, listing those issues which he considers priorities. I was happy on reading the article, to see that he is determined that his department take a more active role in the preservation of Islamic monuments. Precisely what strategy to follow is a problem that has dogged his predecessors for, as he explains in the interview, the fact that these monuments are often located in the midst of densely populated quarters poses incredibly complex logistical problems.

The fact remains, though, that a great many irreplaceable Islamic monuments are steadily deteriorating in the most frightening way. Dr Gaballa intends to concentrate his initial effort on consolidating those structures which suffered earthquake damage before embarking on a programme of conservation that will include many of the most vulnerable buildings.

Given the proper monitoring and supervision, his department will encourage the work of foreign experts in the fields of excavation and conservation. He is particularly keen to focus the activity of these groups on the Delta, which remains one of the least explored areas of Egypt. The as yet untapped wealth of archaeological remains located north of Cairo could supplement not just Egypt's own heritage, but the heritage of the whole of humanity, he believes. And it is for this reason that his department is keen to encourage responsible elements within the foreign community to undertake some of the necessary work.

The interview also emphasises the importance of security and the Department of Antiquities, under its new secretary-general, is anxious to see the new security system installed in the Egyptian Museum extended to other institutions and monuments that fall under its mandate. I was also happy to notice that Dr Gaballa is a fervent supporter of foreign exhibitions of Egyptian relics. Certainly, such exhibitions generate an enormous amount of publicity which can only enhance Egypt's image abroad and throw into relief its profile as a holiday destination. Events showcasing the richness of the Egyptian heritage cannot be assessed in simplistic economic terms. There must be a coherent cost-benefit analysis, in the wake of which, I fervently believe, accrued advantages will heavily outweigh purely financial costs.

I should like to take this opportunity to wish the new secretary-general every success as he begins to shoulder the great responsibilities that are part and parcel of the illustrious post he has been chosen to fill.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Restoration, not renovation

Palaces and mosques are the most frequent targets of restoration efforts which seek to showcase the splendour of the past. Today, different ideas are being floated: restoration by the people, for the people? Fayza Hassan writes

"A restored building is not a new construction" could have been the motto of a conference sponsored by the Göethe Institute on the restoration of domestic architecture. Restoration work is necessarily limited by the original construction, and the greatest possible respect for the architectural styles and details — even techniques — of the time at which it was built. During the conference, held at the Mubarak Public Library, German and Egyptian architects exchanged ideas about the restoration of inhabited domestic buildings and their occupants' participation in the process.

The concept of citizen participation was launched a few years ago, soon after the 1992 earthquake, when the first of the seminars organised by the Göethe Institute and the Faculty of Fine Arts were held. In January 1993, soon after the first meeting, the Association for the Preservation of Old Cairo was founded, launching a self-help programme. In this respect, the association is adapting an idea which has recently gained great popularity in development circles: give people the means, and let them do the rest.

This year, the members of the association organised a three-day event, focusing on the presentation of a book, *Citizens' Participation in the Renovation of the Old Town*, co-authored by Ahmed Abduh, professor of Fine Arts at the University of Helwan, Herbert Kallmayer, ministerial councellor with the Building Authority of the Bavarian State Ministry, Munich, and architect Klaus J Shultz, also from Munich. The book was produced by the Göethe Institut Kairo and the Faculty of Fine Arts, in German, Arabic and English. It details the aims and objectives of the experts, who are promoting the active participation of tenants and owners in the repair and restoration of their dwellings.

The group are presenting nine private houses which they previously identified as suitable for the application of their concept, and are showcasing a model (at 2 Atfet El-Zelahi, off El-Mahgar Street in the Citadel area), owned by one Abdel-Qader Sukkar, the restoration of which has been recently completed with the technical assistance of Salah Zaki, president of the Engineering Faculty of Al-Azhar University, and his assistants.

The Sukkar house, which features interesting woodwork on its balconies, was in rather good condition. Built in 1850, it was originally a three-storey construction; a fourth storey, recessed 1.5m from the side street, was added some time later. The work effected mainly involved fixing or replacing water pipes and the drainage system — the main causes of decay in old buildings. It also included rewiring the building and making minor cosmetic repairs to the exterior.

Though the financial outlay in the end was small, the house now not only stands out among its dilapidated neighbours, but is sounder and healthier to live in — and less likely to collapse. The association is looking for other houseowners in the vicinity of the completed rehabilitation project who are willing — and able — to participate in the programme, using their own capital to complete the repairs needed, with the professional assistance of members of the association.

Candidates can avail themselves of the expertise of qualified engineers and architects who will arrange for an inspection of the mains system, then advise as to the urgency of infrastructure repairs, taking into consideration the limited means of the "client". First-aid measures to consolidate the infrastructure and protect it from further decay can be taken at this point, and the inspection of the building, including repairs to parts which are liable to fall, can be carried out; finally a coat of paint is applied inside and out.

Several principles guide the work of the association, some based on the experience of several of its members, involved in restoration work in Germany. While their previous work may not seem directly relevant to this task, especially in light of this area's very limited means, they have learned lessons they are now putting to the test.

The association's task is not to construct new buildings, but to help save the old, keeping their character intact. The restored house is meant to take its place in the ensemble (alley, street, quarter), which — hopefully, and with the co-operation of the inhabitants — will slowly regain its original aspect. Furthermore, it is essential that owners and tenants actively participate in the process. "Experience has shown us that only what one pays for is valuable and worth maintaining," said one of the German experts. "The inhabitants who have paid and toiled to fix their house will realise that it has to remain in good condition and willingly carry out minor repairs that will be needed in the future to keep the building continuously in good condition."

During the restoration phase, the association proposes to establish a technical department for the preparation of the work to be carried out. From rundown sites in the neighbourhood, workers at the construction site will collect still usable construction materials, such as stones for the repair of walls, wooden beams, windows and other components that will be stored on the grounds until needed. A makeshift store will be erected on the premises, from which tools, machines, scaffoldings and other equipment will be loaned for a nominal fee to owners or tenants actively involved in the rehabilitation process.

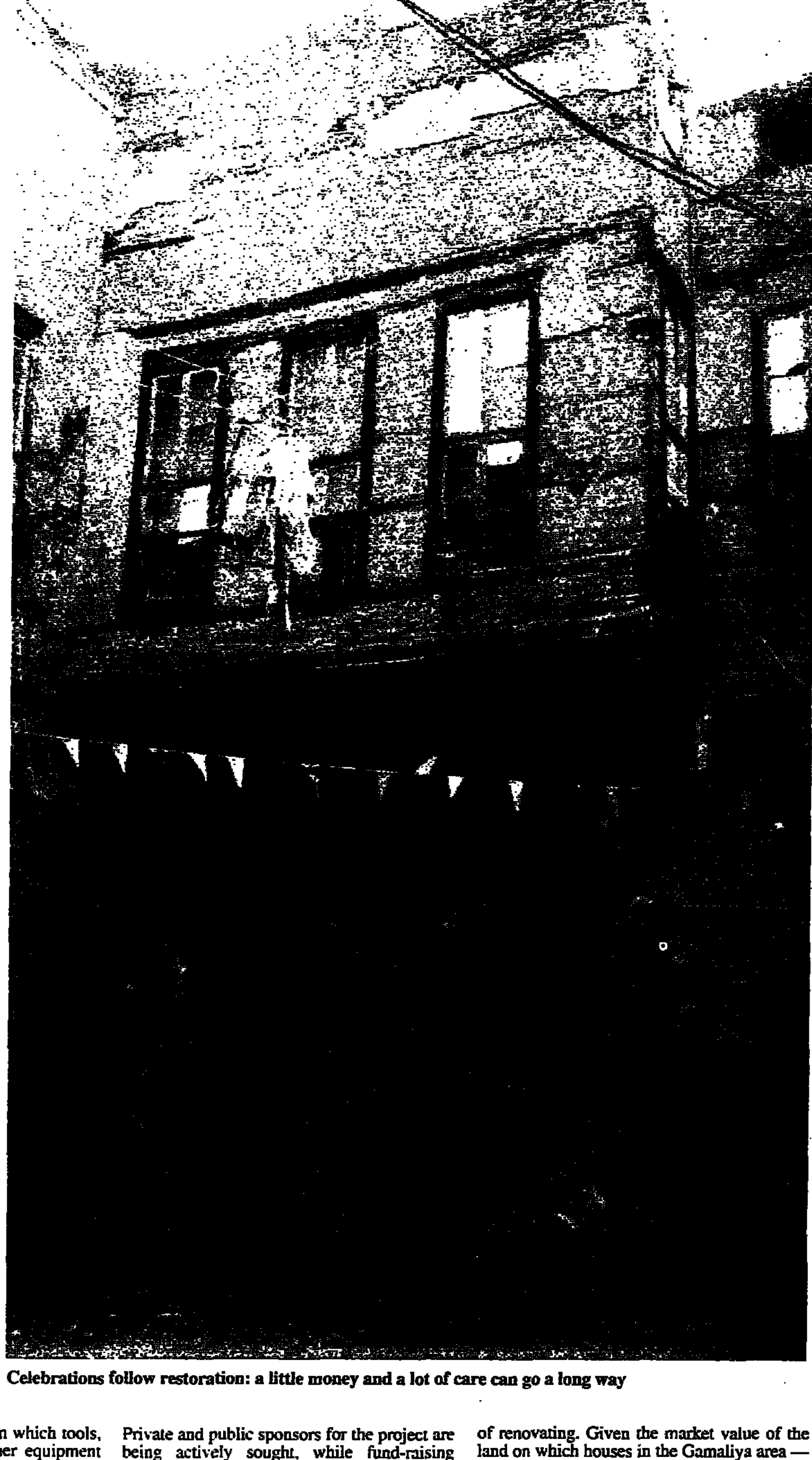
The association will attempt to attract the attention of prospective restoration amateurs by staging a vast variety of public events at schools, mosques, workshops and cafés, such as discussion sessions with local residents and photo exhibitions of work in progress. Information on specific restoration problems will be readily available, as well as on-site consultations by qualified engineers and architects.

In close co-operation with the Egyptian government, the association will endeavour to establish financing schemes for the rehabilitation of public and private buildings, free spaces and public infrastructure facilities. Private and public sponsors for the project are being actively sought, while fund-raising campaigns among international organisations are being initiated. Finally, the association will soon be sending a group of Egyptian experts in construction and social sciences to Germany, where they will have a chance to study similar projects which have been successfully completed there.

It is, however, relevant that the German municipalities play a central role in this type of rehabilitation, a role on which the Cairo model cannot be based. There is nevertheless a vacuum which will have to be filled effectively if restoration of the old quarters of Cairo is being considered seriously.

The project will also be limited by other considerations, not least among them the fact that rent control can act as a powerful disincentive for house-owners to make the effort of renovating. Given the market value of the land on which houses in the Gamaliya area — often architecturally unique, but hardly profit-generating — are built, many owners would rather see their buildings literally collapse. Unless a law is issued forbidding the demolition of houses dating from a certain period, and unless incentives are offered making it worthwhile for those who do accept to renovate, the association may not find many takers.

In fact, it seems that only plans to upgrade the area as a whole, giving owners and tenants alike a stake in preservation and restoration, offer hope for Islamic Cairo. In the absence of such a vision reconciling the inhabitants' needs with the necessity of saving an invaluable slice of architectural history, however, even a band-aid job is better than nothing.



Celebrations follow restoration: a little money and a lot of care can go a long way



Bridal blushes

When I was a child, my mother taught me what was pretty and what was not. She decided about beauty in the same way as she decided about our menus. I dressed to her specifications. There was little room for divergence. As a teenager, I questioned many rules, but never dared to doubt my mother's taste. It was not good, or exquisite, or divine. It was just taste, in the absolute meaning of the word, defying qualification and, therefore, contradiction. Her aesthetic pronouncements remained with me for ever. I saw things with her eyes, and at certain points in my life it bothered me a great deal. I found that I only liked the aspect of things my mother liked. When she was not around, I could not decide for myself. For a long time, I did not feel my own person.

I thought a lot about the way concepts of beauty are formed and developed. I bought books and went to art exhibitions, hoping finally to devise a vision of my own. Failing this, I tried to be tolerant of other people's taste. It only worked with my daughters, leading me to suspect that, if I did not gasp in horror at their more outlandish fashion creations, it was out of sheer motherly love. These suspicions were definitely confirmed when I found myself voicing the opinion that spinach-green nail polish looked "cool" on my granddaughter's nails.

Recently, I have been gratified to notice that my daughters' taste has evolved into something very much akin to mine, which is my mother's and probably my grandmother's before her. My daughters have decidedly moved towards sobriety, now sharing their sense of beauty with at least three generations in our family, and probably many people of similar backgrounds. We belong to a sort of private club, its members judging the world's aesthetic forms and colours from a particular angle, secure in the belief that we cannot be wrong, our sophisticated vision having slowly been honed by education, experience and maturity. We are inhabited by the absolute conviction that we are entitled to decree where beauty lies and where it does not, and it is therefore with immense frustration that members of our coterie come to the realisation that many are those who not only do not see eye to eye with us, but actually refuse to see the light.

"My God, look! A purple building — how dare they impose such a monstrosity on us?" I screamed the first time I realised that a particular hue of violet was going to grace the exterior of a particular high-rise for a long time to come.

Not only was purple used lavishly, but the windows, balconies and other architectural details had been painted fuschia for contrast. My companion shrugged. "Aren't you appalled?" I asked urgently, unable to believe her indifference. Obviously she wasn't — and I was at a loss to explain why the colour purple was architecturally offending.

Soon I was to observe that a quantity of the ghastly colour had found its way onto the palette of many exterior decorators, together with salmon pink, the details picked out in orange, dark pink or baby blue. Cheddar cheese yellow is now often associated with electric blue, while pink — a colour my mother warned me long ago was only seen in cheap underwear, and should be shunned staunchly at any cost — is used with abandon in every possible tone. Though I did make exceptions and sometimes sported, albeit rather shyly, a little pink in my otherwise sober attire, I am positive the colour was never intended for large architectural surfaces.

"Why don't we do something — anything?" I wail on every occasion, contemplating the fate of the urban guerrilla as the offending blotches multiply, seemingly by the minute, dotting the landscape with new eyesores. "Wasn't the Sphinx painted red once, with royal blue and gold wings?" I am asked. "Think of the temples and their bright paintings, the ornate Mameluke and Ottoman buildings, their brilliance shining in the sun. This is just a new decorative trend. People are tired of drab and dusty façades. These colours are actually uplifting," says a friend, as we stand before a building covered in bright ceramic tiles. "Can't you see?" I splutter, "this material is fit only for the walls of a bathroom, and not one decorated in very good taste at that. You don't use it on the outside of buildings. It is bad enough to have to put up with all the granite; it is cold, ugly, lifeless... It is simply unsuitable," I say, wanting to shake him. Indignation chokes me. I am almost in tears. He thinks a while, observing the building somewhat critically.

"It washes well," he says finally, "unlike those old buildings that you like so much. I wonder how much an apartment costs?..."

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Chicken with béchamel

Ingredients:
1kg chicken breast fillets
1/2 cup pitted green olives
2 green bell peppers (thinly sliced)
3 large tomatoes (diced)
2 onions (thinly sliced)
1 tbsp. tomato paste
Salt+pepper+allspice+oregano
Béchamel sauce (an adequate quantity)
Butter

Method:
Boil the chicken breasts the usual way, then dice.

Gently fry the onion slices until yellowish in colour. Add the green olives, stir for a few seconds then add the tomatoes and the spices. Stir until the tomatoes become tender. Add the tomato paste plus one cup of water. Add the diced chicken and allow to cook in the sauce until it thickens. Coat a baking dish with butter. Pour the chicken mix. Add the béchamel sauce and sprinkle some grated cheese on top. Bake in a moderate preheated oven until the top is golden. Serve hot with a rich green salad and sautéed vegetables.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Slow, slow, quick quick, slow

Andrew Steele dines on points

Is it a restaurant or an art gallery? It's actually both, the Arabesque, named, perhaps, after one of those severe ballet moves executed with some aplomb by dancers with remarkable legs. Perhaps not. The decor contains no dance motif, but certainly a Middle Eastern one. One enters through the gallery space, which is cool, bright and airy. Ensconced behind a wall of *mashrabiya* screening lurks the rather darker, but rather more objet-laden restaurant, its ceiling the deepest of blues, embellished with decorative crescent moons and shiny gold stars. It is just the right side of twee, and the bits and pieces of Arab ornamentation fit together to form a fairly classy whole.

We were seated promptly and drinks orders were taken. To my mind, this is the right way to go about things. Perusing a menu with a dry palate can be a tedious affair. The menu was brought, the daily specials were recanted. We perused the pickings of the Arabesque's bill of fare. Soups, hors d'oeuvres, salads, *mezze*, meat, fish and the inevitable "oriental selection" were there to tempt us. I, as is so often the case, as regular readers of this column will know, was tempted by a fish. A *poisson meunière*, to be exact, but more of the objet d'art of entrées later.

For starters we picked the *Mezze* d'Arabesque. Pot luck, so to speak, as which oriental raptures the chef would select for our delectation was not listed. We failed to enquire, but the choice was neither surprising nor disappointing. *Daoud Basha* then, in a tasty liquor; moist, savoury vine leaves and *sambousak* filled with a pungent cheese. Lightly battered fish fingers and melt-on-the-tongue chicken livers. A fine platter, all the constituent parts of which contrived to taste very home-made indeed. And then came the main course.

I don't like to grumble about what is ultimately a very good restaurant, but the entrées were upon us less than a minute after the last vine leaf had met its maker, which, despite the rather good fish *meunière* and oriental chicken, played havoc with my rather curmedgeonly digestion. When is a *meunière* not a *meunière* ? I would opine, when it comes in the guise of a batter, with a sauce and rather tasty flat mushrooms (where *did* you get that fungus?). The chicken was sautéed to a lovely crisp, in lashings of butter. This did not detract from the fact, however, that it had immensely tender breasts. The rice, it must be added, was heavenly. Mine came laced with spinach and parsley, my companion's was rife with nutmeg, cinnamon and even the odd sultana. Silver service not withstanding, however, it was all a bit too quick. An enjoyable meal all in all, but executed from entry to exit in 40 minutes flat. The total for two, with two Stella Exports (local is not to be found) came to a fairly reasonable LE140. If time is of the essence, it's well worth a visit. A warning though: don't attempt those tricky ballet moves on a full stomach.

Arabesque, 6 Qasr El Nil Street, Downtown Tel: 5759896

Al-Ahram Weekly Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

Across
1. Culture medium (4)
5. Fix firmly (3)
8. Comedian; player (5)
13. Having effect by surgery (9)
15. Flatering manner (5)
16. Basic standard (8)
17. Reduced to a smooth cream (5)
18. Morsel (3)
19. Electronic news-gathering, abb. (3)
20. Humans (3)
21. French summers (4)
23. Rudimentary (9)
29. Indefinite article (2)
31. Yeoman of the Guard (4)
32. Blackthorn (4)
33. Procreated (5)
36. Away from (3)
37. Boobook (3)
38. Miss Novak (3)
39. Reminiscent of Dante (7)
42. Following in the latest fashion (3)
43. Employ (3)
44. French law (3)
45. Constitutional (5)
47. Dresses (4)
49. Formerly (4)
51. ...and fro (2)
52. To a lower place (9)
55. Comb. form for "agricultural" (4)
59. 3-toed sloths (3)
60. A fowl (3)
62. Accelerate (3)
63. Make minor improvements (5)
66. An organism that grows without air (8)
68. Comedy (5)
69. Detachable cover for chair (9)
70. A chemical bath for altering colours in photographic finish (5)
71. Spasm (3)
72. Flat-bottomed vessel (4)

Down
1. Not together (5)
2. Beau... (5)
3. 2.5 acres (3)
4. Abnormal rattling sound heard in auscultation of unhealthy lungs (4)
5. Undivided (6)
6. "All about..." (3)
7. Symbol of "tellurium" (2)
8. A poplar tree (5)
9. Corresponding to foreign nobles (6)
10. A sailor (3)
11. Allow access, poetic (3)
12. A cereal plant (3)
13. Musical instrument (4)
14. Prong (4)
20. In the mind (6)
22. Subside under pressure (3)
24. Remarkably strange (7)
25. A French grimace (4)
26. Hawaiian ciao (5)
27. Part of a spur (5)
28. Dog's shrill cry (4)
30. Incline one's head (3)
33. Type of ex (5)
34. Make corrections; touch up (5)
35. Claws of birds of prey (6)
38. A type of African antelope (4)
40. Not any (4)
41. Trap (3)
46. Tibetan gazelle (3)
48. Spiritualistic session (6)
50. Denoting origin by birth (6)
53. Horseman (5)
54. A large amount (4)
56. Thicket (5)
57. Revolutionary (5)
58. Above (4)
61. Scruff (4)
63. Towards the stern (3)
64. Chinese revolution leader (3)
65. Sea eagle (3)
66. Boxing champ (3)
67. Deer (3)
69. Street, abb. (2)

■	1	2	3	4	■	5	6	7	■	8	9	10	11	12
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16								■	■	17				
18			■	19			■	■	20			■	■	■
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C	O	D	E	■	A	D	O	R	E	■	E	D	G	E
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A	C	A	J	O	U	■	U	R	U	S	■	E	O	S
T	I	B	A	■	T	A	M	E	D	■	S	P	U	N
I	L	L	■	P	I	N	E	■	E	L	U	A	T	E
■	Y	E	A	R	L	I	N	G	■	O	R	T	H	E
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T	A	R	T	S	■	■	N	O	T	E	■	I	N	K
S	C	A	R	E	C	R	O	W	■	■	R	A	I	N
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R	E	E	L	■	I	N	E	R	T	■	V	E	E	R

Last week's solution

Mad or just bad?

Investigations following the attack on a tourist bus in Tahrir Square have revealed that some criminals are escaping legal punishment by feigning insanity. **Gihan Shahine** investigates the regulations governing admittance to mental hospitals and recent efforts to improve conditions







Mental hospitals are seen as a "safe haven" by some convicts who may try to claim insanity to escape jail. Officials say that conditions are improving within the hospitals and that bribery for certificates of insanity and abuse of patients have been stamped out

photos: Abdel-Wahab El-Sehelli Adel Ahmed and Medhat Abdel-Megid

Mohsen, not his real name, said the angels used to help him visit the woman he loved and that he used to take her up to the heavens where their spirits met. As he was talking, Mohsen picked up a match, put it in his mouth, and tried to light it, giggling like a hysterical child. But his attempt to claim insanity was seen through.

"Mohsen was feigning insanity to escape a conviction of murder, but I could spot it immediately," recalls Dr Gamal Madi Abul-Azayem, a veteran psychiatrist, who also headed the government-run El-Abbassiya mental hospital for 10 years.

Mohsen was charged with murdering the husband of a woman with whom he was having an affair. He initially pleaded guilty, but his lawyer apparently convinced him that the charges against him would be dropped if he pretended to be insane. "My diagnosis was proven true when, after writing a report stating Mohsen was sane, the lawyer tried to bribe me into changing it," said Abul-Azayem.

Mohsen failed in his attempt and was sentenced, but other criminals have been successful. A lawsuit reported in the daily *Al-Ahram* earlier this year described the case of Ismail Abdel-Wahab Ragab, a man whose pretense of insanity was believed, at least for some time. After he was charged with drug dealing, Ragab was referred to El-Abbassiya mental hospital for an investigation of his mental state. The hospital's report stated that he was mentally ill and could not be held responsible for the crime. He was admitted to the El-Abbassiya mental hospital and was supposed to be transferred to El-Khanka mental hospital, where convict-patients are sent.

Ragab, however, never arrived at El-Khanka. The administrative board of El-Khanka finally sent the prosecutor general an official request to hand him over. A few days later, the police raided El-Abbassiya mental hospital and found that the convict was running a drug-dealing business from his "secure" place in the hospital. He had 300 narcotic pills and 420 grams of *bango* in his possession.

"Cases where convicts simulate madness are widespread," said Samir Abul-Maati, chief of the Supreme State Security Emergency Court. In a train robbery case, 34 people were convicted and nine of them pleaded insanity.

The prosecutor was naturally sceptical. He planted an undercover policeman in the cell where the suspects were held. There, the undercover policeman was able to secure evidence that the suspects had conspired to pretend insanity in order to escape punishment.

According to Egyptian penal law, Article 62, there is no criminal responsibility if, during the crime, the perpetrator was not of sound mind due to madness or the effect of a drug that he was forced to take.

It is essential, however, that there be a correlation between the nature of the crime and the convict's insanity. Dr Ahmed Okasha, professor of psychiatry at Ain Shams University and president of the Egyptian Psychiatric Association, explained that if someone was deluded that his wife was having an adulterous relationship with his brother, and killed his neighbour who looked like his brother, he would be exempted from punishment. But if the same person killed the *makwagi* [ironer] because he did not iron his suit properly, he would be held responsible.

Although sane convicts have been abusing the law for years and escaping punishment by feigning insanity, the problem only came into public and official focus when a tourist bus was bombed by a run-away patient-convict last month. Saber Mohamed Abul-Ela Farahat, who was caught red-handed, confessed that he used to bribe the staff at El-Khanka to get out of the hospital. He later told how he had bought the certificate confirming his insanity for LE50,000 from the head of El-Abbassiya hospital, Said El-Qott.

Investigations that followed the Tahrir incident underlined the extent of the deterioration in the conditions of state mental hospitals over recent years. Following the arrest of El-Qott, it was discovered that a number of convicts obtained certificates of insanity to escape punishment, while others, who were not insane and had money, were forced into the hospital by greedy relatives who wanted to get their own hands on the cash.

Conflicting reports were often written about patient-convicts, extended home leave was granted to patients who could pose a danger to both themselves and society, incidents of torture and abuse of patients were reported and services for patients were revealed to be extremely poor. Security measures were also discovered to be significantly lacking, especially in El-Khanka where dangerous patient-convicts are hospitalised.

The tourist bus affair has raised many questions about the adequacy of legislation protecting mental patients and mental hospitals against lawbreakers. But many claim it is not the law itself that is at fault but rather the hospitals and ultimately the Ministry of Health.

"I don't believe that the law is responsible for the mistakes made when admitting patient-convicts to hospitals," said Abul-Maati. "The judge is not a specialist in the field of psychiatry and thus depends on the professional opinion of the state-run mental hospital."

Under current legislation, if the convict's lawyer pleads that his client is mentally ill, the judge refers him to El-Abbassiya mental hospital. There, the convict is fully examined by a committee of three psychiatrists and should stay under 24-hour observation by the doctors, nurses, and social workers for 45 days. The committee then submits a report to be signed by the director of the hospital, which is referred to the judge.

Sometimes the judge finds the report unsatisfactory, in which case he is entitled to form another external committee of highly qualified and reputable psychiatrists for further examination. In very rare cases, when the two reports are contradictory, the judge forms a third committee to give a final word on the case. If the convict proves to be mentally ill, he is referred to El-Khanka where most patient-convicts stay under police custody.

"In most cases, the judge is satisfied with the hospital's report since he has too many cases to deal with and forming another committee to re-examine the convict would mean delaying the case to another session," said Ezzedin Riyad, a lawyer. "The law puts too much authority into the hands of the hospital's manager, which, in itself, is a loophole in the legal system. The prosecutor loses track of the convict once he is admitted to hospital. There should be a periodical follow-up on all the cases in co-operation with the Ministry of Health."

The reliability of certificates of mental incompetence, the efficiency of staff working in mental hospitals and the role of the ministries of health and the interior in providing sufficient security measures at government-run mental hospitals and in implementing rules organising home leave for patients have been challenged following the Tahrir tragedy.

Cases where patient-convicts had escaped or taken extended home leave and then committed crimes or acts of violence, have since come to light. The system for leave is subject to Law 141/1944 which stipulates that the patient be granted home leave only with the approval of the manager of the hospital, who should submit a report on the patient's case to the prosecutor general and the Council For Supervising Mental Illness, affiliated to the Ministry of Health, for approval. It is mandatory that the patient be escorted by a staff member or a security man from the hospital during his leave.

"It is not the law that is insufficient here, but rather the application that is not properly imposed," said Ezzeddin. "And that is due to the lack of security in these hospitals. The hospital is always held solely responsible for the escape of a patient-convict but I believe it is equally the responsibility of the Ministry of Health and the security bodies in Egypt."

Most psychiatrists, however, believe that violations occur in state-run mental hospitals simply because of the lack of human and financial resources and because the field of psychiatry in general is not given due attention in Egypt. "It is very easy for an experienced psychiatrist to know whether a person is actually mentally ill or just feigning insanity but the problem is that efficient psychiatrists are significantly lacking," Okasha complains. "In Egypt we have only about 500 to 600 psychiatrists, 300 of whom are still interns. According to the World Health Oragnisation's recommendations, there should be one psychiatrist for every 10,000 people. In Egypt, however, we have only one psychiatrist for every 200,000 people," he added.

In El-Abbassiya mental hospital there are about 15 doctors looking after 2,000 patients, and some of them are still interns. In El-Khanka, about 30 doctors look after 2,600 patients. "Social workers, psychologists and nursing staff are also lacking and are below standard," Okasha said.

This shortage in psychiatrists, many experts agree, is due to the lack of incentives to enter the profession and stay in Egypt. "About 70 per cent of our graduates who specialise in psychiatry get jobs abroad or in the Gulf states, where they earn more money, leaving us with the least efficient," Okasha commented.

According to Okasha and Abul-Azayem, the psychiatric core-curriculum for undergraduates in Egypt is below the standard recommended by the World Federation for Medical Education. "It is to be expected then that some graduates confuse those who are feigning insanity with those who are actually mad," Abul-Azayem regrets.

Hani Lutfi, however, the current head of the El-Abbassiya mental hospital, claims that the hospital has senior psychiatrists and that, since he took over its management, all reports issued by the hospital have been accurate. It is noteworthy, however, that Lutfi totally depends on his psychiatric staff in writing reports because he himself is not a psychiatrist — he has a degree in hospital management.

Lutfi maintains that services for patients have greatly improved recently in El-Abbassiya mental hospital. He vehemently denied all charges of torture and abuse of patients. A new catering service has been provided for patients, he added. In the next 18 months, two five-storey buildings, with 200 beds each, will be added to the hospital. "The only problem that we have is that we are short of nursing staff and the number of patients is increasing because families hardly ever take patients back home," he said.

Last month a presidential decree placed the five main public mental hospitals, El-Abbassiya, El-Khanka, Heliopolis, Helwan and El-Ma'moura, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health instead of local councils. Minister of Health and Population, Ismail Sallam, declared that the ministry plans to up-grade services in the hospitals and tighten the regulations on patient admittance and home leave.

A short-term plan, to be put into effect in three months time, includes establishing a higher committee to oversee the five hospitals and define the responsibilities of the staff there. The plan also includes speedy investigation of reports of abuse or negligence in public mental hospitals and taking rapid action against senior medical and administrative staff if such reports are proven. Co-ordination between hospitals and universities will be established and university professors will be allowed to open clinical units inside public mental hospitals.

These preliminary measures are part of a broader long-term LE40 million plan to develop services in the five Ministry of Health-affiliated mental hospitals, which currently house some 8,500 patients. The plan includes increasing the number of available beds, up-dating medical equipment, making salary adjustments for the medical, administrative and nursing staff and implementing new security and administrative systems. A new nursing school will also be established to train specialised nurses. A supervisory body will be established to follow-up the services extended to patients in mental hospitals and possible amendments to Law 141/1944 will be considered in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice.

Sallam also declared that renovation work is well under way on the wards of El-Khanka, which date back to 1850, and its administrative board has already been changed. The hospital will be furnished with playgrounds, gymnastic equipment and a video and TV room. A file of the medical and social history of every patient in the hospital will be kept. The Ministry of the Interior is to provide the hospital with a well-trained security team. Home leaves will be subject to strict regulations and will be carried out under a tight security system.

The Ministry of Health is also considering a proposal to establish wards for the criminally insane inside prisons. Sallam told the press that putting a criminally insane patient in a general mental hospital may pose a danger to other patients. Besides, such wards would be a guarantee against incidents of escape.

The ministry's jurisdiction to the mental hospitals and its plans for improvement are welcomed by experts.

According to Ahmed Okasha, the plans for a shake-up of the mental health services in Egypt will make little headway unless the level and standard of available human resources is greatly improved. And, for now, Okasha suggests what is really needed is a dedicated committee of psychiatrists, legal advisers and patient representatives. This committee should enjoy full authority to implement policies and manage budgets. "And this is where I can really see hope," Okasha concludes.

Risky medicine

An illicit trade in medical drugs is rife in Cairo's backstreets, and as **Zeinab Abul-Gheit** finds out, the health of the unsuspecting public is at risk

It is Friday, time for the Sayeda Aisha market on the outskirts of Fatimid Cairo. Picking your way through the hustle and bustle of pigeon pedlars, fishmongers, carpet merchants and plastic souvenir traders, you will not see them. But the merchants of under-the-counter medications are there. They are just a bit shy of recognition, and with good reason. Their fare is made up of counterfeit drugs, smuggled pharmaceuticals, and recycled medical insurance prescriptions. The police do not like it, and past raids on their mobile businesses have taught them to be wary.

In the unpaved alleys of El-Kharta market, in Cairo's "City of the Dead", a kitchenware merchant is going about selling cups and plates. He has been pointed out by other pedlars as a freelance medicine seller. Upon request, he produces a collection of pharmaceuticals and asks us to choose what we need. He does not know any of the names of the drugs which he buys from a trader who smuggles them in from Libya. If we want to find him again, he is always in the same spot every Friday. His prices can be tempting.

A customer bought a cough syrup for 50 piastres. But he had no cough to treat. He bought the alcohol-based drug for its "calming effect." One of the cheapest alcoholic fixes you can get in Cairo.

But more serious customers exist. Families with low incomes seek illegal medicine because it's much cheaper than its over the counter equivalent. They are not ignorant of the risks but choose to overlook them. According to Gamil, a plumber: "It is better to take a less effective medicine than no medicine at all." Fathiya, whose husband has a chronic respiratory ailment, says that the medicine she buys for him from the moonlighters costs LE50 a month. In a pharmacy, it would have cost LE200.

The Sayeda Aisha market is not the only haven for the fly-by-night traders. Many perfume and cosmetics pedlars in the Gaza market in El-Ataba sell pharmaceutics on the side. The legitimate representatives of the industry are enraged.

Dr Mahmoud Abdel-Maksoud, secretary-general of the Medical Professions Federation, says the Pharmacists Union has been trying to put an end to the illegal trade, but repeated police raids have so far failed in stamping out the phenomenon. Pharmaceutical companies have been asked to tighten control on their supply of drugs and make sure that no drugs make their way to unlicensed peddlers.

One of the ways medications find their way to backstreet dealers is half-legal. The first half: an individual on health insurance could go to the clinic, feign symptoms of illness, get a prescription, and obtain the medicine. The other half of the deal, the illegal one, comes when he sells the medicine to black market dealers for hard cash.

Sometimes it is just a way of getting back at the system by poorly-paid government officials, as Cardiologist Magdi Abdel-Aziz explains: "Some patients on health insurance programmes feel that they should get back the deductions from their salaries for insurance purposes." By selling their prescription medication on the black market, they achieve just that.

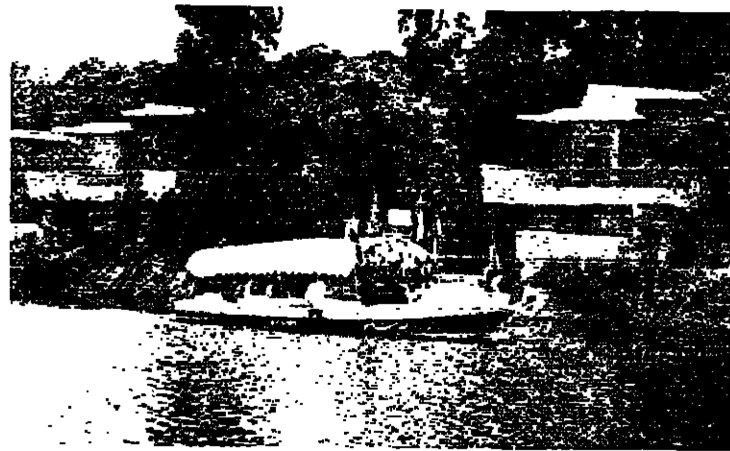
Corrupt individuals in the medical profession are also to blame. Hospital supplies of medications are subject to theft. Samples of medicines given away by the pharmaceutical companies as well as expired drugs can also find their way into the illicit trade, said Dr Abdel-Aziz, who calls for stricter measures to combat these forms of fraud.

The hazards of the illegal trade are many, according to Dr Abdel-Baset Taher, lecturer of pharmacology at Al-Azhar Medical School. Expired medicines are not simply ineffective. They can be harmful. Medications stored in the wrong temperature could be dangerous. And, pharmaceuticals taken without prescriptions can have serious side-effects, particularly if they clash with another drug the patient is taking. High doses of certain vitamins can cause enlargement of the lymph nodes, for example. Ten tablets of iron supplement can be fatal for children. Chronically ill patients should be subject to regular check-ups to gauge the effect on their health of their prolonged intake of medications, Taher pointed out.

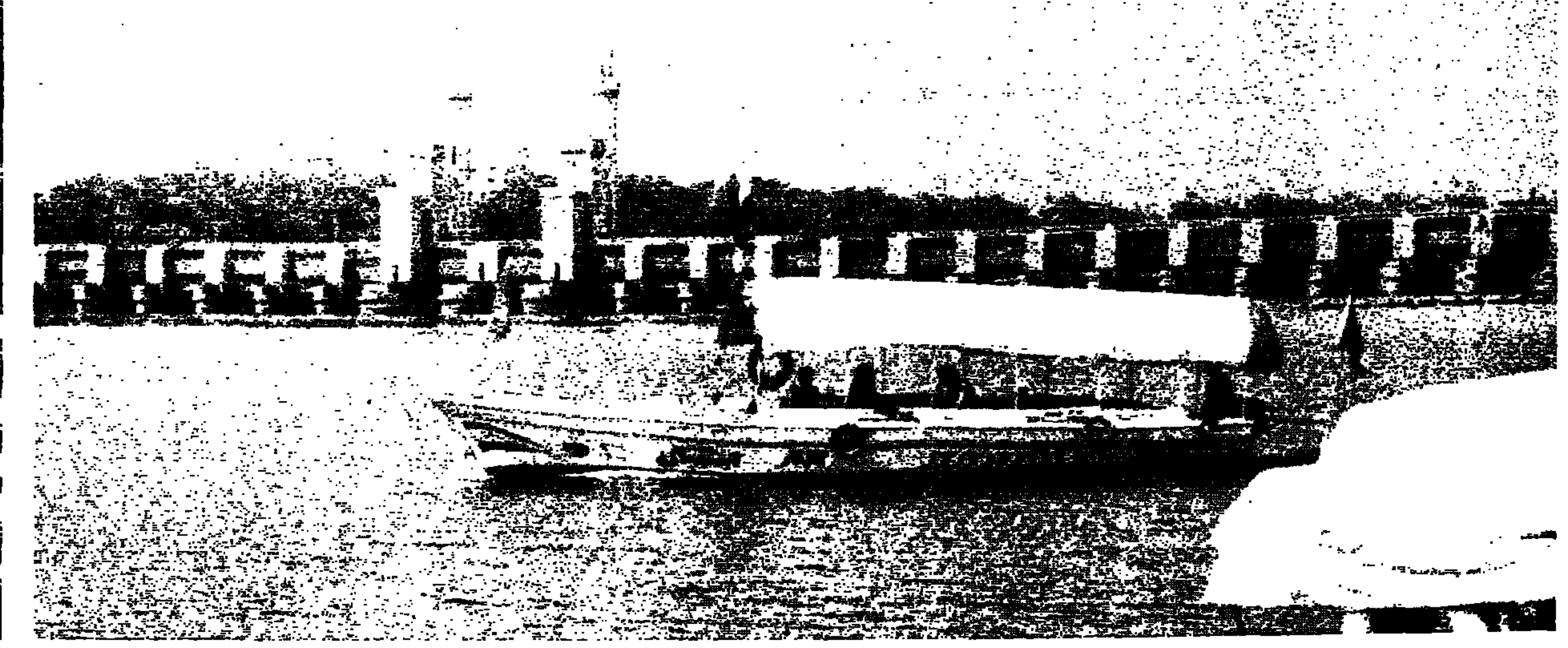
Another reason for the existence of the illegal trade is purely medical. Some doctors prescribe medicines that have not yet been registered in the country, and therefore remain unlawful to import. Patients, in this case, have no resort except to buy them illegally from unlicensed importers. Pharmacist Kamil Mustafa calls on doctors not to prescribe medicines that cannot be sold legally in the country.

Counterfeit drugs are also part of the phenomenon. In a major raid a year and half ago, police confiscated two tons of illegal pharmaceuticals, some of which were fake merchandise produced in local workshops. Another part of the confiscated goods represented expired medications that had their labels switched to show a valid date of use. Dr Shawki Abu Kura, director-general of inspection at the Health Ministry, calls on the public to avoid the illegal trade. Despite the attractive prices, he says, it is a risk not worth taking.

Al-Ahram Weekly







A cruise along the Nile near the dam is the perfect way to relax (above and far right). The Irrigation Museum displays models of barrages throughout the centuries (right) *photos: Amr Gamal*

Weekend travel

A nice day at the dams

A trip to the Nile barrages north of Cairo reveals just how much the area has improved in recent years. Sherine Nasr found the gardens clean, the air fresh and the services adequate

A 25-minute drive north of Cairo is all it takes to get away from the hustle and bustle of the capital. In this short time a visitor can reach the 52-gate Mohamed Ali barrages, which cross the Nile at Qanater before the river divides.

Green fields stretch in all directions around the barrages and the choice of activities for visitors is endless: a stroll or picnic on the greenery, a calm *felluca* ride on the Nile, a horse ride, a fishing trip or a meal at one of the cafés or restaurants. The potential is great and the prices reasonable.

"Activities for visitors are so varied that one day is hardly enough to enjoy all there is to offer," said Khaled Lotfi, director of Morgana tourist village situated near the barrages.

For many years, the barrage area was thought of as no more than a big garden where poor and lower-middle-class families could go for a day out, taking a picnic lunch along. And it was generally known that the litter left behind was uncollected. The site did not have a desirable reputation, it had simply become run down since the 1950s.

In 1993, however, a new lease of life was injected into the area. Attention was given to expanding the green spaces, providing better quality services and developing the barrage as a potential attraction for discerning weekend visitors. Six million pounds were allocated by the government to further enlarge the gardens and improve services.

Today the green area covers some 165 feddans which are open from 7.30am to 5pm all week. *Entry is free.*

"One hundred feddans are used as open parks which have been provided with pergolas, seats and bathroom facilities," said Yehia Gaber, general manager of the gardens. The other 65 feddans are fenced gardens where a more up-market service is provided. "Some of these overlook the Damietta branch of the Nile while others are on the Rosetta side. The gardens have cafeterias that provide fast food, a police kiosk and a clinic. The entrance fee is PT50," he added.

Some of the trees dotted throughout the park land are 150-years-old. "There are many rare species that can only be found at the barrage," said Gaber.

One of the most attractive sites is the "chalet area" where 25 chalets are fully equipped for visitors. "These are single and double air-conditioned chalets with a terrace overlooking the Nile," said Khaled Lotfi. Each has a grill for those who want to have their own barbecue and can be hired for LE75 a night. A discount is given to those who stay for a longer time.

A newly-opened traditional Egyptian quarter nearby provides visitors with a Bedouin-seating area, Egyptian food and *shisha*, water-pipes.

The barrages are popular with Egyptians and Arabs who flock there in the summer season. The latter come in such large numbers that special programmes are designed for them. "They usually stay for a full week. They like to jet-ski or go on long *felluca* rides to enjoy the scenery and fish. Lunch and *dinner, cooked in Arabian style, is often* served on board," Lotfi said, adding that Arabs like to go horse-racing in the spacious green areas.

Egyptian families come in large numbers during national and religious feasts. "The barrages receive almost 200,000 people at such times," said Gaber.

Word of the changes in the area is quickly spreading, with first time visitors determined to come back for more.

"This is my first visit. I heard much about how it had improved and decided to come and see for myself," said Maha Khalil, a civil servant from Cairo. Khalil had hoped to relax for the day, but her four children had other plans. "They have decided to go to the swimming pool followed by the fun fair, there is so much to do," she said.

Amm Ahmed who has owned *fellucas* and motor boats for almost 40 years takes his clients to unusual sites. "We visit honey and banana farms. We can go as far as the point where the Nile divides," he said. "The trip can last for just half an hour or be extended to three and lunch can be served on board. The prices vary from LE5 to LE50 according to the distance."

The barrages are attracting more and more foreign tourists too, especially those from Russia and Germany. "Almost 50 per cent of the visitors in winter are Germans and Russians who come to enjoy the splendid atmosphere and warm winter sunshine," said Lotfi.

Travel agents have begun to arrange one-*day trips to the barrages where visitors can* take the *taftaf* "open-air bus" to visit the Irrigation Museum, one of the main attractions. They may then participate in a bicycle race, go to the swimming pool and the sauna or enjoy a game of billiards.

The museum provides a documented history of all the dams and barrages in the Nile basin, from Ethiopia to the Mediterranean, as well as methods of irrigation from the Pharaonic age right up to the present time. One of the most interesting models is that of the Mohamed Ali barrage itself, the first ever to be constructed on the Nile.

Other models show important engineering works such as the Aswan High Dam, the famous waterwheels of Fayoum and different methods of irrigation from the *shadouf* of Pharaonic times to the waterwheel introduced by the Romans, and finally the *tambour* and Archemides' Screw widely used in Islamic times. Ship-building through the ages is also featured in the museum with examples ranging from papyrus boats made in ancient times, to wood.

The museum is open daily and entrance is free.

Practical tips:

A river bus departs for the barrages at 7.30am every day from the front of the Radio and Television Building on the Nile. The journey takes about two hours. The ticket is LE3.

Public buses depart for the barrages from Ramses and Tahrir terminals.

Site tours

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter.
A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matrouh
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36.
Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32
Cairo-Port Said
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said
Service 6.45am, from Ramleh Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurghada
Service 8pm, from Ramleh Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.
Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

East Delta Bus Company
Buses travel to North/South Sinai
Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qulali (near Ramsis Square), Almaza and Tagnid Square (near Heliopolis). Buses to North and South Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abbessiya Square. Tel. 482-4753.

Cairo-Ismailia
Services every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 6pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

Cairo-Suez
Services every half hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5, one way.

Cairo-El-Arish
Services every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE21; air-conditioned bus LE13, one way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Services every 45 min. from 7am to 6.30pm from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets morning LE27; evening LE40, one way.

Cairo-Nuweiba
Service 8am, from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets deluxe bus LE31.

West Delta Bus Company

Stations at Tahrir and Almaza. Tel. 243-1846.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Cairo-Safaga
Services 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.
Cairo-Ousseir
Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Luxor
Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Aswan
Service 5pm. Tickets LE50 one way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40 am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians, to Aswan LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians.
"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria
"Torbini" trains
VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal.
Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.
"French" trains
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 772410.

Cairo-Aswan
Tickets LE351 for Egyptians, LE1143 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor
Tickets LE259 for Egyptians, LE829 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada
Tickets LE279 for Egyptians, LE898 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Tickets *LE287* for *Egyptians*, LE945 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Egyptian tourism on the Internet

Here are some useful addresses on the Internet, including tourism magazines, archaeology and travel agency programmes:

http:// www.idsc.gov.eg/links.htm is an address through which you can access other useful tourism addresses on the Internet. Here they are:

http://www.idsc.gov.eg/tourism is the address of Egypt's Tourism Net which provides directories of Egypt's hotels, restaurants, cruise lines, travel agents, transportation companies and tourist attractions. Egypt's tourism net is a part of many home pages (culture, health, environment, etc) created by the IDSC as a part of the nation's Information Highway.

http://163.121.10.41/tourism is the key to Egypt Has It All, where Egypt's tourist sites, such as the Red Sea, Cairo, Luxor, Aswan, the Sinai, Alexandria, oases and ETA offices abroad are described. The magazine also contains colour photographs of Egypt.

http://www.memphis.edu/egypt/egypt.htm is the address of the University of Memphis, and describes their projects in Egypt.

http://www-ceg.ceg.vivc.edu/~haggag/travel.html is the address of Egypt's Tours and Travel, which organises packages for people who want to take quality tours. It is an Egyptian tour operator, which specialises in tours within Egypt, the Holy Land and the Middle East.

http://www.geocities.com/TheTropics/7210 is the address of The Curse of the Pharaohs. It includes photographs of ancient tombs and temples.

http://www.ezy.be/horses is the address of The Arabian Horse Worldwide Guide. This guide aims to promote the world's most beautiful and versatile horse — the Arabian.
http://intercoz.com/egypt is a 2,000-page magazine, published by the Ministry of Tourism, where all Egyptian tourist sites are listed and described.
http://www.datum.com.eg/~city is the address of the magazine *Cairo Scene*, Cairo's first on-line art and entertainment guide. It is the most up-to-date source on where to go and what to do in Cairo. It has also sections for books and the latest CDs besides proposed places to visit like Wadi Rayan.
http://watt.seas.virginia.edu/~aoa5v is the site of Exodus Egypt, a daily site covering home news including political, social and cultural events.

Roman baths discovered

The biggest Roman baths yet discovered in Egypt have recently been unearthed near Damietta. Samir Naoum was at the dig

A team of Egyptian archaeologists have recently unearthed what they describe as the biggest Roman bathing complex ever discovered in Egypt. It was excavated at Tell El-*Barashid in Fariskur, 15km south of* Damietta. Fariskur is the city where 10,000 French soldiers led by King Louis IX were killed on their return from Mansoura to Damietta during the Crusades. The city was later used as headquarters by Sultan Toran Shaah.

The *tell*, or mound, where the discovery was made is one of many in the area. Beneath them, hidden like time capsules, are the squashed remnants of settlements dating back to Graeco-Roman, Coptic and Islamic eras. The objects discovered include fragments of marble, alabaster, sandstone and limestone, clay and stained glass, said archaeologist Atef Abul-Dahab, leader of the excavations at Tell El-Barashid.

The baths, constructed along a 75m water passage running east to west, were tiled with white mortar and had a tunnel coated with burnt clay with a cover of white cement. They were surrounded by a number of rounded *mastabas*, or benches.

A number of wells, five-metres deep, were dug to provide water and drainage ducts made of clay run to the west to the baths, where the ground is lowest. Some of the ovens used in heating the water have been found.

Residential quarters were discovered to the south of the baths. The rooms, 5x4m, have cavities in the corner, possibly for the storage of grain. Other rooms have small brick basins for drinking and washing. Clay pots and decorated lamp stands dating to the Coptic era have been found on the floor of these rooms.

In the area between the residential quarter and the baths, a number of stone weights were found – mostly of limestone, granite and basalt – as well as coins dating to the Graeco-Roman era. "There is every indication that a market once existed here. The findings suggest an active area in the Roman era," *said Antiquities Inspector Sami Eid.* However, some of the artifacts belong to other periods, he pointed out: "Coptic writing found on a golden plate indicates that economic activity in the area must have lasted till Coptic times... a stone inscribed with hieroglyphics may have once belonged to one of *the priests. Clay pots coated with glazed en*amel are remains of the Islamic era."

In the area to the north of the baths, an olive press and a winery were discovered. "Olive oil was used in massages and wine was drunk after bathing," explained Eid.



photos: Samir Naoum

A team of archaeologists inspect the recently discovered Roman water channel (above), while excavators unearth the remains of the bathing complex (left)

Brain versus brain

Last week the final match of the 2nd World Golf Croquet Singles Championship was decided in front of a large and admiring audience in Gezira. Nashwa Abdel-Tawab reports

The lawn is perfectly green. The sky is almost clear. There is even a nice refreshing breeze. In silence, many a knowledgeable gaze turns to follow another *ingenious* shot, waiting for the clack of one ball against another which may signal impossible success or miserable failure. Croquet is a game that is played partly under the sun, but mainly in the mind — even if the players hold mallets large enough to do away their opponents with, and have to put their muscles behind them as well as their malice. It is chess with the added spice of physical violence. It is snooker for adults. No wonder it is a success with spectators who like to think about what they are watching. On Saturday, a large crowd of experts and would-be experts watched thoughtfully as Salah Hassan beat Walid Salah 5-7, 7-4, 7-3, 7-6 in the finals at the Gezira Club to win this year's World Cup.

33-year-old Salah Hassan won the applause of all but the most biased of fans because, as one of them said, "he plays a tough game gently... he understands his opponent's plans perfectly and is able to thwart all his attempts to win". At one point in the final set, Walid Salah hit the ball through one arsaw only to have his shot disallowed by the referee, even though he and the spectators had all seen it go through. A furious Salah was about to stomp off the lawn, but Hassan intervened quickly and quietly to make him change his mind. When play resumed, Hassan could easily have knocked Salah's ball away from the arsaw, but instead he played his ball to one side so as to let Salah take his fifth — and last — point. Hassan then went on, cool as a cucumber, to shoot straight through the two left-hand arsaws with a single strike. A croquet player is only ever as good as his nerves. Hassan is a very good croquet player.

He is also an engineer. He started playing croquet in 1983 when he was 19. He feels it is the ideal sport for his talents. Besides his interests in music, art and the theatre, he plays croquet almost all the time, shoots billiards when it's raining, and rides a horse when it isn't. He was Egyptian Open Singles Champion in 1995 and is half of the reigning Egyptian Men's Doubles champion pair. He also took third place in the first World Championship in Italy last year. "Croquet is an intelligent game. It's not ball against ball, but brain against brain. You have to find a way to get the balls through all seven arsaws or else you lose," said Salah. The runner-up, Walid Salah, is a singer by profession. He has been playing croquet since 1979. He won the Egyptian Men's Championship in 1987 and the Open Singles Championship in 1997.

Out of the eight Egyptians competing, six finished in the top ten. The first four were all Egyptians and the fifth, just to complicate things a little, was an Egyptian of American nationality, Sherif Abdel-Wahab. Sherif holds the record for hitting the fastest ball of the tournament, clocked at over 40 miles per hour. Sherif, his brother Ihab, and Mohamed Kamal are all Egyptians who hold dual nationality and who played under the American flag, *faute de mieux*. They tried to enter the competition as Egyptians *tout court*, but the national Croquet Federation chose to give preference to players who had come up through the national tournaments, rather than fly in potential stars for the occasion. Yet the potential stars were undeterred and found their own way round this obstacle. Nothing can stop a croquet player from playing croquet.

Hani El-Shobki, aged 32, came third after beating his fellow countrywoman, Nahed Hassan, by three sets to one. Nahed, 44, a lawyer and the current Egyptian Ladies Champion, was placed fourth. The youngest competitor was Matthew Burrow, aged 17, from England. He had travelled to Egypt with his mother, Sarah Burrow, who took up croquet so as to be able to keep her son company, and his grandmother, Doreen Burrow, 66, whose interest in the game was rekindled when her grandson became addicted. The whole family enjoyed the high standard of croquet played at Gezira, and commented on what tough competitors the Egyptians were.

48 players participated in the 2nd World Golf Croquet Singles Championship, representing 12 countries: Scotland, France, Palestine, Ireland, Italy, the USA, Belgium, England, Jersey, South Africa, Switzerland and Egypt. The players' ages ranged from 17 to 66.

The English are at present very poorly ranked in the game, although croquet is an English invention that only came to Egypt in 1882 during the British occupation. Since the Egyptians learned how to play croquet, however, they have begun to outshine their former teachers. They have even introduced changes to the international rules of the game, and are universally admired for their great skill and flair. "The foreign players don't hit the ball strongly, but the Egyptians are used to playing a tough, strong, quick game," said Ahmed Hamroush, president of the Egyptian Croquet Association. It has been decided by the International World Croquet Association that Egypt will hold an international championship every year for golf croquet, in addition to the Association Croquet Championship. Next month, 28-year-old Walid Wahban from Alex Sporting Club will represent Egypt in the VIIth World Association Croquet Championship in Australia.

The fifth week of the national league tournament was full of surprises, especially for the top teams, Abeer Anwar reports



Ahli's players trying to balance after losing to Qana's players' 0-1 in one of the league surprises — photo: Mohamed Wassim

Topsy-turvy

It was one of those weeks. A week when Canal, who had hitherto been languishing at the bottom of the league with only 4 points to their name, showed they could teach the champions a thing or two. It began at Assiut University Stadium, where Canal beat Ahli 1-0. Was that Ahli, winners of innumerable league titles and countless cups? Ahli who were leading this year's league too, unbeaten — until they dropped those three points? It would seem it was. Starting out full (some might say over-full) of confidence against such a "weak" opponent, Ahli were convinced the match was already in the bag before they reached the pitch. The newcomers may have looked weak to begin with, but instead of going in and finishing them off while they had the chance, Ahli sat back and let Canal regroup and organise. In the 37th minute, while Ahli were still warming up, Yasser Tahseen put Canal ahead with the first and only goal of the match. From then on, the best that could be said of Ahli was that they defended well — if they had not, the goal difference would have been even greater. Ahmed Koushary took a penalty — and missed. Ahli are still top of the league with 12 points. But many of the spectators in Assiut must have been wondering why.

The Arab Contractors came up with the week's second surprise — the 7-0 trouncing of Ithad Othman, that kept them hot on the heels of Ahli, in second place with 11 points. This season, the Arab Contractors are determined that whatever else they may be, they'll be contenders. Their seven goals came from Mohamed Adel (2), Abdel Nasser Mohamed (3) and Mohamed Abdel Fattah and Mahmoud Marouf with one a piece.

Zamalek, meanwhile, was trying to restore a somewhat tarnished image after humiliation abroad in the African Clubs Championship. Not that Menya, currently bottom of the league with 1 point, provided them with any terribly serious problems, losing 2-0. Zamalek are now placed fourth in the league, with a total of 10 points, and they were further buoyed up by their rivals' results. Not only did Ahli lose, but Ismaili drew 2-2 with El-Ittihad. This will have helped boost their confidence before the decisive match tomorrow against Al-Afriqi of Tunisia in the qualifying rounds of the African League Club Winners Championship.

It was also a good week for Aswan under their new coach Gamal Abdel Hamid, as they won their third match of the season, beating Suez 2-1 to bring their total points to 9 in three matches.

In the other league matches, Baladiat El-Mahala drew with Shams 0-0, Masri beat Suez 1-0, Damietta drew with Port Fouad 0-0 and Mansoura beat Mahala 2-1.

A Spanish victory

Last Sunday the 75th Cairo Challenger held from 13 to 19 October, came to an end at the Gezira Sporting Club. The finals were satisfying to watch, though they held few surprises

The 75th Egypt International Tennis Championship — Mena 97 — was played out on the central court of the Gezira Sporting Club, the traditional venue for the competition since its inception in 1907. **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab** reports . Thirty-two players took part in the main singles draw, in a very strong field that included Alberto Berasategui from Spain, ranked 24, Javier Sanchez, ranked 44, Karim Al-Alami from Morocco, ranked 67, Dinu Pescriu from Romania ranked 83, Gilbert Scraller from Austria ranked 92, and David Sanguinetti from Italy ranked 93.

"It was a very strong tournament," said Dieter Madlindl, ATP tour supervisor, "with a great number of tennis stars with good international ranking participating. The last direct acceptance was Razvan Sabau, who's ranked 214." He added that he had never seen so many top 100 players take part in a Challenger. Madlindl was particularly impressed with the Egyptian referees. "They were very fair and decisive," he commented.

The matches, especially the final rounds, were fought very hard, though the identity of the winner was hardly a surprise. Alberto Berasategui beat Karim Al-Alami 7-5, 6-3 in a two-hour-long battle that pitched the determined Spaniard against a Moroccan contender who seemed to have underestimated his opponent's strengths. Berasategui's deadly on-the-line shots were the key to his victory. Alami's back hand just was not strong enough, and his struggle to stay in the match was hindered by far too many double faults and misjudgements that gave points away. Yet in the end, he was a gracious loser, smiling as he received runner's-up trophy. Berasategui took $14,400 and 90 points, Alami $8,480 and 65 points.

In last year's competition, both of this year's finalists had failed to realise their promise. Berasategui lost the finals 6-3, 1-6, 3-6 to the 25-year-old Brazilian, Fernando Meligini, ranked 114. Top-seeded player two years running, Berasategui was so ashamed, he vowed to return to win the Egyptian title, however long it might take. Alami for his part was bounced 6-1, 3-6, 6-2 in his second match by the 19-year-old Austrian, Stephan Koubek, ranked 366. He felt his defeat even more deeply because, as the only Arab player, he had been a focus for the crowd's hopes and aspirations. This year he seemed to have learnt his lesson and showed much greater determination and control than in the past. Yet despite a vastly improved performance, in Berasategui he met his match.

The two Egyptians with wild cards, Amr Ghoneim and Gihad El-Deeb, were well below the standard of the main draw, and were easily defeated in the early rounds.

The Spanish pair, T Carbonell and F Roig, who were seeded first, won the doubles trophy, beating W Arthurs from the United States and E Ran from Israel 6-3, 6-3. The doubles games were generally agreed to have been much easier than the singles. The doubles winners took $6,200 each as well as a total of 90 points.

Mena 97 is classified as a Challenger Competition, one of the highest ranks among professional tournaments. This year the total prize money was $120,000, compared to $75,000 last year. The competition was supervised by the ATP which is responsible for all professional tennis competitions, including Challengers, the Super Series and the Grand Slams.

From 1907 until 1990, when it was temporarily interrupted for financial reasons, the championship was held at the Gezira Sporting Club. It is one of the oldest international championships in the world: only the four major Grand Slams — Wimbledon (1877), the US Open (1881), Roland Garros (1891) and the Australian Open (1905) — and the Davis Cup for mens' teams (1900) are older.

The Greek Zerlendi holds the competition record, having won the tournament five times. Major General Adli El-Shafei was the first Egyptian to win the championship in 1946. El-Shafei was the father of Ismail El-Shafei, the former president of the Egyptian Tennis Federation and the best Egyptian tennis player ever, who won Wimbledon in the '70s. The Egyptian Championship has provided a launching pad over the years for many international stars. When Thomas Muster took part in 1990 he was ranked only 16. Today he is one of the top seeded players in the world.

Centre of attraction

Egypt's first Open Squash Championship was a challenge not only for the players taking part, but also for the federation that organised it, **Eman Abdel-Moeti** reports.

There was certainly no shortage of upsets on the court, which led the players to refer to the competition as the "terror tournament". After Craig Wapnick of South Africa defeated world number two Rodney Eyles, and Nick Taylor defeated Chris Walker, Egypt's Ahmed Barada, Scotland's Peter Nicol, and Canadian Jonathan Power took it in turn to imagine that if miracles can happen, then they might defeat Jansher Khan. Barada met Khan in the quarter-finals and lost 3-1. Nicol, who had stolen the Ahram Championship from Jansher met him in the semi-finals and lost 3-0. Power, who had managed to delay their encounter till the finals, also lost 3-0. Jansher may not be participating in the World Championships next month in Malaysia "for personal reasons", but his victory in the Egypt Open certainly proved it is going to be quite some time before any other player can dominate the world of squash as he does.

The challenge for the new president of the Egyptian Federation, Hossam Naser, was perhaps just as daunting. The first difficulty was getting the idea accepted that it was possible to hold an international squash championship outside Cairo. "We [the federation officials] thought the best place was Alexandria, since it is the second biggest city after Cairo," said Naser. He also pointed out that when the federation thought of holding an Egyptian Open, it was not their aim to organise an international championship similar to Al-Ahram. Egyptian world star players like Barada, Omar El-Brolossi and Amir Wagih have already put Egypt on the world squash map, and it is up to the Egyptian Federation now to maintain this status, if not improve on it. Alexandria proved to be an excellent venue, its Graeco-Roman heritage reflected in the design of the indoor hall at the Alexandria stadium, while the famous portable glass court imported from England was used to host the main draw. Alexandria has as much to offer as Cairo, whether it be five-star hotels or tourist attractions. However, the real challenge facing the federation was how to fund the event. Coming right after the World Junior Football Cup, and coinciding with the World Croquet Championship and the International Tennis Championships, there were practically no sponsors left in Egypt who were not already fully extended. In the end, it was the dedicated squash fans were the ones who saved the federation from embarrassment, stumping up total prize money of $100,000.

"But the best thing is that we now have an international championship that officially represents Egypt," said Naser. Now the country has a competition to compare with the Singapore Open, the German Open or the USA Open. "This doesn't only enable those of our players who don't have a world ranking to hone their skills, but it also gives our referees the opportunity to become international referees," Naser added. According to the World Squash Federation, a referee has to judge a certain number on matches in international championships, under the supervision of other international referees, before he can be certified as an international referee himself. Egypt's Naser Zahran and Ahmed Naser have been attending many international competitions both in Egypt and abroad so as to acquire the necessary experience, and they have been supervised by the best referees in the world. The Egypt Open Squash Championship gave them a valuable opportunity to complete the probationary period. Only Egyptian referees were assigned to judge the tournament, with a German and an English referee to supervise them.

The success of the Egyptian Open was crowned by the gracious patronage of President Hosni Mubarak's patronage. The federation intends to hold the tournament in a different province each year, as well as organising an Egyptian Junior Open on the model of the British Junior Open. Australia, Pakistan, and England have historically dominated the world of squash, with Egypt only putting in an occasional appearance in the record books. But as Hossam Naser says: "Today, there is no real competition without Egyptian players. In the future, the centre of attraction will not be England, but Egypt."

Ten pins for Tutankhamun

The World Bowling Cup is coming to Egypt — and not just to the new International Bowling Centre opened last week. Eman Abdel Moeti reports on some Pharaonic ambitions for the newly-naturalised sport

Last week, President Hosni Mubarak inaugurated the International Bowling Centre in Nasr City which will host the World Bowling Cup EMF from 15 to 22 November. The centre has 24 lanes, as well as an underground billiards hall, and was constructed by the Armed Forces in record time. During the World Cup, it will play host to more than 145 men and women representing 88 countries. Two Egyptians, Mohamed Ibrahim and Heba Saleh, have qualified and will be representing Egypt in their respective events.

The qualifying rounds were held at Cairo Land's Bowling Centre, but not even that venue could compare with the splendour of the new 9400-square-metre International Bowling Centre and its state of the art equipment. The two representatives of EMF's organising committee who were present for the inauguration, Anne Marie Board and Bernard Gebbins, said that they had not expected such a "grand hall". Board added: "I am speechless, it is a marvelous bowling centre."

Bowling is the second most popular sport in the world, according to Amr Kamel, head of the organising committee, and Mahmoud El-Etr, the assistant organiser. The Egyptian government has recognised this fact by taking special notice of the coming world championship. On the day he inaugurated the International Bowling Centre, President Hosni Mubarak gave orders for the media to provide special coverage for this important event. He also gave orders for the customs duties on bowling equipment to be reduced. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri has agreed to act as the guardian angel of the World Cup. Many governmental agencies and ministries have also cooperated to subsidise the competition and ensure its success.

Bowling was introduced to Egypt only three years ago, but has been expanding rapidly, with ever more bowling alleys attracting an ever increasing number of players. Though still not a major *baladi* leisure-time activity, today the cost of a game of bowling is at least within the reach of the upper-middle classes. Since the Egyptian Bowling Federation was formed last June, as many as 22 clubs have joined; and the number of players has swelled unceasingly. In preparation for the World Cup, the federation recruited the international coach Joseph Veel, under whose expert guidance a player from the United Arab Emirates won the World Cup in 1989. The national team is made up of the winners of this year's National League. They have been training with Joseph for five months now. Veel told the *Weekly*: "We should not expect our players to achieve high places in the final ranking." He explained that it took him six years to raise the standard of the UAE team to international level. However, he also added: "I did not expect to find so many talented players in Egypt." He explained that when he first arrived, the players' had good basic technique, but lacked the truly professional touch. The World Cup, which this year will have a record number of competitors, will be an excellent opportunity for them to test their newly-acquired skills under pressure: "When they stand at the foot of the lane, their mind will go blank at first, and they will not remember anything of what I have told them. But that is not unusual," Veel predicted, laughing.

Mohamed Ibrahim is the youngest Egyptian in the final eight who qualified for the World Cup last week. Still a student — "and a businessman", he was quick to add — he has never participated in an international competition. Yet his lack of experience did not prevent him from surpassing his opponents and qualifying for the World Cup. Ibrahim has trained four hours every day since he took up bowling two years ago. His team-mate, Heba Atef, is a young accountant, who also took up bowling two years ago, but she trains only two hours a day. Yet she managed to accumulate more points in the qualifiers than Sherin El-Gohari, who was the favourite to qualify, given her international experience. Heba's only experience at that level was gleaned in the United Arab Emirates Open Championship. She came second in the Cairo Open two months ago.

Hosting the World Cup in a year with such a bumper crop of entries will certainly help put Egypt on the world bowling map. Amr Kamel, head of the organising committee and member of the promotion committee of the World Bowling Federation, expects Egypt to become the centre of attraction for international bowling tournaments in the Arab world and the Middle East. The Egyptian Federation is hoping that the success of the World Cup will pave the way for them to further popularise the game in Egypt and they hope that they may be able to host the World Junior Cup in the near future. One spectacular innovation may help clinch it for them: the final of the Seniors World Cup will be held on the Pyramids Plateau, with one of the most stunning monuments of human civilisation as a backdrop.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

M. KHODEIR P.O.BOX 1057, CAIRO 11511, TEL:418-0034/418-0035 FAX:418 26 63



photo: Sherif Sonbol

Panayoti Soulous:

From Attarin to Maxim, he has gone places — but what about Mustafa?

Le destin

To have the Midas touch is a rare thing indeed. But if anyone has it, Mr Soulous definitely does. For over six decades, whatever this restaurateur and hotelier has touched immediately turned into a spectacular business enterprise. A sequestrated restaurant? Enter Mr Soulous and *voila* — the hottest night spot in wartime Alexandria. A well-appointed bakery whose owners have died? — your favourite pizzeria.

Nor is his a trite rags-to-riches story. What makes the 90-year-old Alexandrian Greek phenomenal is the context in which he made it big, and the way in which he manipulated his dual identity against the grain of the times. Greek business success stories were quite common in Alexandria at any time from the reign of Mohamed Ali until the late 1930s. Then there was the growing sense that the party was over and the waves of immigration of foreign residents started — 1936 and the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty; the post-war malaise; *1952, the deposition of the king; 1956, Suez* and the repatriation of French and British nationals; the sequestrations of the early '60s. It was against this background of abandoned posts, confiscated property, *hasty departures* and *deportations* that Soulous built his empire.

Like many Greeks on the make, Mr Soulous' father arrived in Alexandria from the island of Leros *in 1882, on the eve of the Urabi revolution and the* British bombardment of the city (the story goes that, on the day the bombing started, he happened to be at the Place Mohamed Ali — one of the focal points — and hid behind a barrel). Soulous *père*, after a spell as director of the Sinadinos family's cotton enterprise, started his customs clearance concern in the harbour.

Of his own schooldays at the Greek patriarchate school, Panayoti Soulous says he was "a very bad pupil, very bad", so much so that he never made it to high school and had to do commercial studies instead — a boon in disguise, as it turned out. On graduation, Soulous joined what was Banque Athens (now the National Bank) as an accountant but, discouraged by what he saw as meagre incentives, soon resigned to join his father's customs clearance offices in the harbour.

A meticulous chronicler of his own fortunes, there is one date that Mr Soulous gives pride of place in his personal mythology. The year is 1932; *Soulous is travelling to Greece by boat*, third-class, the fare of LE 2.50 having been advanced by a friend whose jailed father in Alexandria needs official documents from home. Between Alexandria and Piraeus, Soulous meets a dazzling young woman, an Alexandrian resident, who is also travelling third class, to visit her parents in Athens. "From that day, Calliope and I became inseparable. It was — *le destin*," says Soulous, and a youthful smile lights up his face.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, the harbour customs were closed and Soulous was temporarily without a job. But the war also opened avenues for commercial enterprise: Italian and German establishments were confiscated and those that were deemed unprofitable were then sold. It was thus that Mr Soulous made his first major investment, and the one with which his name would always be associated. With a friend, he purchased the Santa Lucia restaurant and bar on Safia Zaghloul Street for LE600.

The city was swarming with troops, out for an "ice-cold in Alex", and competition between restaurants and bars was fierce. But Soulous soon found an edge: "Other Greek establishments — Pastroudis, Athineos, Trianon — all put up signs saying: 'Officers Only'. I, on the contrary, put up a sign saying: 'All Ranks'. We made an awful lot of money." Coupled with the fact that he also had a solid job at a textile factory, Soulous' moneyed condition did not escape the attention of Alexandria's Greek debutantes.

"The dottas [dowries] started. I would be approached about the daughter of X, the daughter of Z, *with their dottas: one was 30,000 pounds*, another 50,000 pounds — which", he grins, "was a lot at the time". At this stage, Soulous was living with Calliope on the Rue St Saba. Having noticed *that Calliope "was becoming sad" — as well she* might — Soulous, "without whispering a word about it, went to the Patriarchate and obtained a permit. It was a Monday 19 August, 1941. "I took *permission from the textile factory*. I went home, she did not know anything. I said get dressed. I took her and we went to St Saba [Cathedral] with two witnesses and got married."

Affairs of the heart now regulated, Soulous redecorated the Santa Lucia and turned part of the premises into a night-club, an addition that has contributed to Alexandria's fund of local legends. Some swear that it was at Santa Lucia nightclub that the Cairene Syro-Lebanese singer Bob Azzam picked up the song *"Ya Mustafa, Ya Mustafa"* — the 1950s hit with which he made his name. The singer at the Santa Lucia, avers librettist and man-about-town Bernard de Zogheb, had composed the lyric for a Nubian waiter — the eponymous Mustafa. The song is indeed typically Alexandrian: a Franco-Arabe and Italian hodgepodge, all pro*nounced with a distinctly Greek accent, replete* with references to Alexandrian landmarks like Attarin and Agami:

Chéri je t'aime, chéri je t'adore
Como la salsa del pomodoro...
Ana bahibbak ya Mustafa
Saba' sineen fil-Attarin,
Dulwa'ti gayna chez Maxim...

Ta'ala ya Mustafa, ya ibn el-sarhan
Nisafir Agami wa niliff al-giran
Wanma yigi kayfu, yishrab ala kayfu, kayfu...

Ya Mustafa, ya Mustafa
Ana bahibbak ya Mustafa...

Quand je t'ai vu sur le balcon
Tu m'as dit monte, ne fais pas de façons...
Chéri je t'aime... la salsa del pomodoro...

Tu m'allumais avec une allumette
Et tu m'as fait perdre la tête...

Surprisingly, Soulous himself does not seem to have heard about the Bob Azzam scenario. He listens with a slightly flattered expression then says he doesn't think Bob Azzam picked up the lyric at Santa Lucia, "though we did have a singer, Rakanakis, who sang it really well", and he does not recall whether there was a waiter by the name of Mustafa. Be that as it may, the *Santa Lucia*, as Alexandria's most fashionable nightclub, attracted a fair share of colourful regulars. Among them was "Kostas Vassilopoulous, from a very good *Greek family. He used to sit at the bar every night* and always had castanets with him and he would accompany the orchestra with his castanets," recalls Mrs Helen Marzouk, the woman dubbed "the *Ava Gardner of Alexandria*".

In 1951, not a moment too soon, Soulous decided to apply for Egyptian citizenship, "because I realised that without an Egyptian passport, it would become impossible to work". His dossier, among sundry other documents, was flown to Capri where King Farouk, who was spending his holiday with Nariman, signed it. There was a price to be paid for this astute decision: dual nationality was not allowed under Greek law at the time, and Soulous lost his Greek passport. But his Egyptian passport, together with his excellent contacts with the cosmopolitans of Alexandria, was to stand him in good stead when the sequestrations started. Those who, for one reason or another, had to leave usually preferred, for sentimental reasons, to sell their property and enterprises to old-time acquaintances rather than to complete strangers, even if the transaction entailed less profit.

It was thus that Soulous acquired the jewel in his crown — the Metropole Hotel. Once the premises *of the Third Circle of Irrigation, where the Alex*andrian poet Constantine Cavafy used to work, the building, which commands a view of the Eastern Harbour and Ramleh Station, had been turned into a hotel in the 1930s, complete with exquisite art deco furniture. By the mid-60s, the owner, "a Greek called Tamvakakis, had problems with State Security, and was ready to sell quickly... I contacted him and bought it for LE9,000," says Soulous. But then Soulous himself, despite his Egyptian passport, was aware of the threat of sequestrations, and was "so scared that I sold 40 per cent to friends and associates, keeping 60 per cent to myself".

Meanwhile, Soulous had set his sights on a bakery next door to Santa Lucia and a liquor depot behind it. While the director of the depot was conniving — he told Soulous there was LE 2,000 worth of liquor inside, his for the price of the depot — the proprietors of the boulangerie turned down his offer to rent the premises. When they both died, however, Soulous bought the boulangerie, too. In 1963, therefore, Soulous opened the Asteria Café and Restaurant — a spacious, unpretentious venue that, in those pre-fast food days, netted Alexandria's hip young things, demimondaines and the *Sunday*-out families pouring from the cinemas all around. The Asteria's main claim to fame, its rather compact but savoury pizza, was, says Soulous, inspired by a visit to Rome *during which he entered a bustling pizzeria and*, after taking permission, jotted down notes on everything from the recipe to the oven.

And through the '60s and '70s, Soulous' empire *expanded, from the east to the west of Alexandria*. There was the spiffy Maxim nightclub in the summer resort of Maamoura. Then came the Reem Hotel in Marsa Matrouh — originally a rest-house *for civil servants which the governor of the city*, a close friend of Soulous', appealed to him to convert into a decent hotel. The sea-front Reem, says Soulous, once hosted Nasser and Sadat. So apparently indigenised had Soulous become, that he was elected head of the Chamber of Touristic Establishments in Alexandria.

Thirty years after losing his Greek passport, citizenship laws changed and Soulous was officially Greek once again, at a time when the community had dwindled to some 1,300. He returned to the fold with a vengeance: in 1984, he was elected president of the Greek Community in Alexandria, a position he was to retain until 1990. Before Soulous got to work on them, the community coffers were nearly empty. But with his polished entrepreneurial acumen, and his carefully cultivated relationships with government figures, Soulous' Midas touch was soon doing wonders.

According to Michel Arslanidis, vice-president of the board of the Greek Community in Alex*andria, "we were at a cross-roads; our finances* were in shambles and we needed someone with a vision who could make bold decisions. Soulous... with his vision and boldness, took some right steps, like selling some agricultural land donated to the community... we bought bonds and with the interest we can now help the poor and renovate community buildings such as the Asile." He adds that Soulous, "because he's a very well-known businessman, made sure our relations with the Alexandria Governorate were good." In acknowledgment of his role, Soulous was elected honorary president of the Greek Community for life.

But these years also brought a devastating personal blow: after a long illness, Soulous' wife died. "When she died, she was the First Lady of Alexandria.... The flag over the Greek Consulate remained at half-mast for three days... There are always flowers on her grave." Calliope's presence is everywhere in the Sultan Hussein Street flat they moved into on 1 January 1945. A photo on the mantlepiece of the living room shows a magenta-lipsticked beauty in a turban, the fur trimmed shawl collar of her coat drawn close about her neck. In the drawing room there are the portraits of Soulous and Calliope (here older, bespectacled, fulfilled) executed by a relatively unknown artist who frequented the Asteria in the '60s. And everywhere in the flat, there are souvenirs from the many trips they took together.

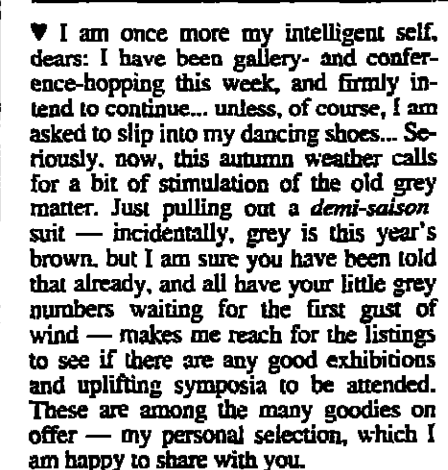
Soulous now lives with his niece while a nephew runs the Asteria. Having turned 90 a few months ago, Soulous kicked the lifetime habit of smoking. He has lost his arms licence, and doesn't *go yachting any more. He* spends his summers at the house he built on Leros, his ancestral island. On sunny winter mornings, he will have himself chauffeured to the Sporting Club or Montaza. Nor *has age diminished his gnomic quality* or *his* nononsense pragmatism.

Today, he sits in his living-room and points to the many certificates of merit and medals of honour on the mantlepiece — *a cross presented him* by the President of the Republic of Greece, certificates from the Egyptian Ministry of Social Affairs and that of Culture. This latter was awarded Soulous in recognition of his role in promoting Greek-Egyptian cultural understanding, and was specifically prompted by the gift he offered for the annual Cavafy Awards. One of a handful of living people who actually saw Cavafy, Soulous' recollections go beyond the usual line about the sardonic old poet with a scarf around his neck. Nor will he recite "The God Abandon Antony" for your benefit. Soulous being Soulous, he will give you the bottom line on Cavafy's finances, the exact sum he inherited from his father, the bank in which it was deposited, and the person to whom it was later legated. Although Soulous felt it was incumbent *upon him* to make a gesture towards the awards, he does not hide his distaste for poets and poetry: "I gave the first prize... for three years, though I don't like poets, because they have their heads in the clouds, *while I prefer to keep* my feet firmly planted on the ground..." — and with at least his description of himself, one cannot help but agree.

Profile by **Hala Halim**

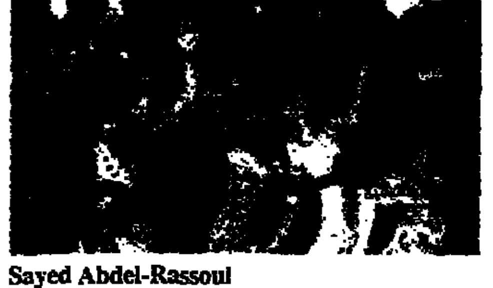
Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris



♥ I am once more my intelligent self, dears: I have been gallery- and conference-hopping this week, and firmly intend to continue... unless, of course, I am asked to slip into my dancing shoes... Seriously, now, this autumn weather calls for a bit of stimulation of the old grey matter. Just pulling out a *demi-saison* suit — incidentally, grey is this year's brown, but I am sure you have been told that already, and all have your little grey numbers waiting for the first gust of wind — makes me reach for the listings to see if there are any good exhibitions and uplifting symposia to be attended. These are among the many goodies on offer — my personal selection, which I am happy to share with you.

First, I intend to catch up with **Sayed Abdel-Rassoul**'s exhibition at **Khan Maghrabi**. I have always been enamoured of the way the late old master depicts women's movements (their body movements, not their political ones, and let us be thankful for a little political incorrectness). It is a rare chance to see several of his works gathered together in the same place.



Sayed Abdel-Rassoul

To satisfy my poetic and musical streak, I shall then attend an evening of poetry readings and piano improvisations — just what the doctor recommended. I'll make sure to be at AUC's Oriental Hall, to enjoy the piano playing of **Ashraf Fouad** and the poetry reading of our own **Nur Elmessiri**, and of **Jim Mayes** and **Valerie de Casas**, on 26 October. I am looking forward to a really delightful evening. I wonder if I should appear in grey chiffon with flowers strewn in my hair. In my salad days, I acted as muse to many an unknown poet, and I am thinking that a repeat performance might just be the thing to crown the evening.

And while I am in the mood, an appearance at the reception hosted by **Mark Linz**, director of the senior staff of the AUC Press, to honour "New and Recent Books and Authors", is definitely in order. My dear friend **Heba Handoussa** will be there, and so will **Nicholas Hopkins**, **Saadeddin Ibrahim**, **Salwa Shaarawi Gomaa**, **Michael Rimer** and **Van Leo**. I already know which new books will occupy most of my shelf space in the next few months!

